

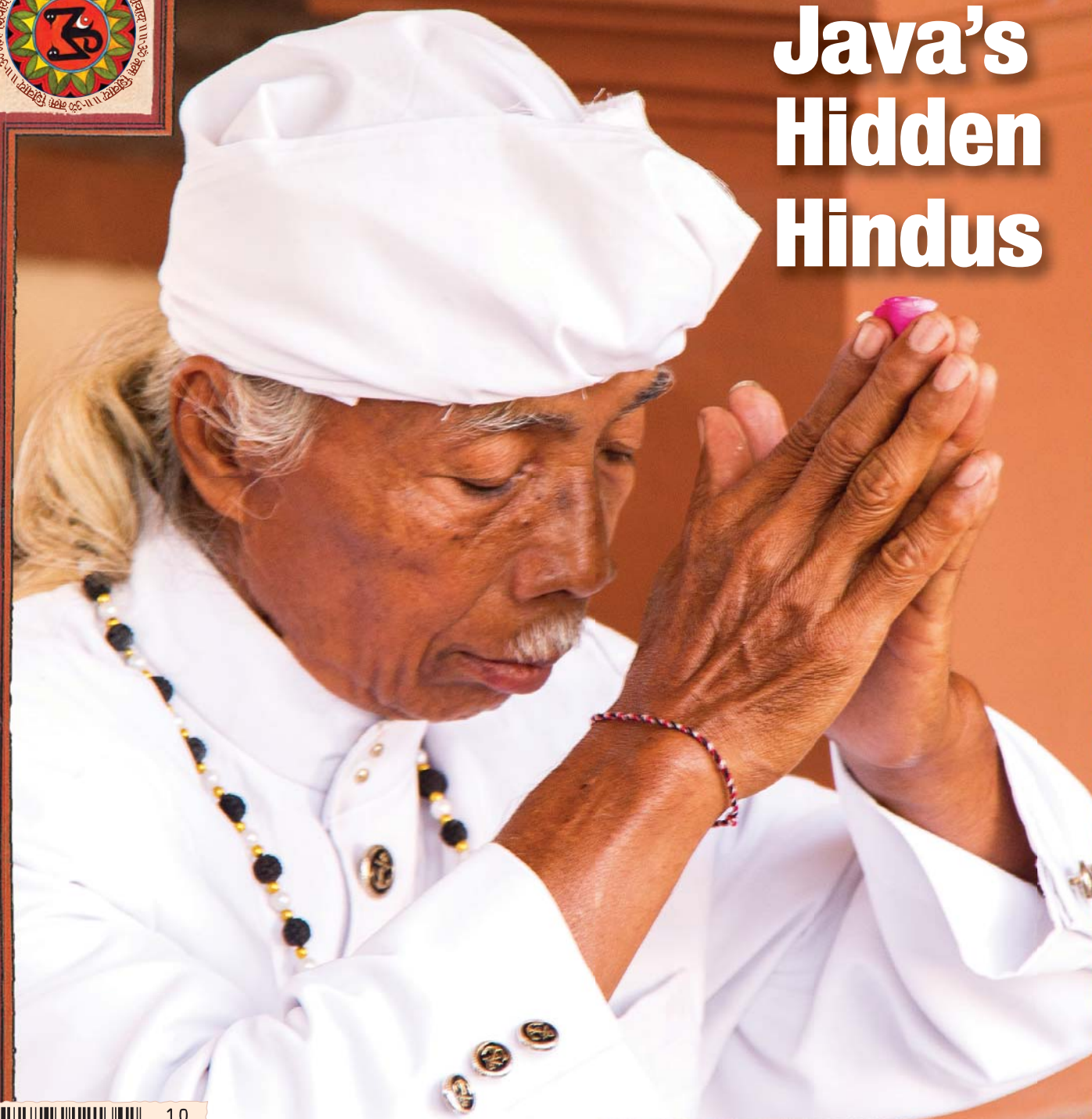
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# HINDUISM TODAY

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



## Java's Hidden Hindus



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COURTESY PARMARTH NIKETAN

COVER: Rishi Bahudanda Sajeevo Dharmo Telaba, priest of Pura Sasana Bhakti temple, Pasung, Java; Muniji (center right) launches Encyclopedia of Hinduism with University of South Carolina president, Dr. Harris Pastides (center) and Anna Hazare (to Muniji's left)

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2014 • THE HINDU YEAR JAYA, 5115

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**Best Hindu Magazine**



# The Gods Are Smiling

Manjari Sharma approaches Deity art with a camera. The results are six-foot-tall portraits that dissolve the restless line between Heaven and Earth. Page 33.





# GLOBAL DHARMA

BELGIUM

## Brussels Parades Ogoh-Ogoh

SINCE 2011, NYEPI EVENTS have been held in Belgium, as a celebration of the Balinese New Year in late March. The event was first held around the Pairi Daiza Hindu temple in Brugelette and by 2013 was held in Brussels. Nyepi tradition—ally begins with the bathing of temple Deities. Artful Ogoh-Ogoh (demonic) figures are then created and paraded through the streets and villages to drive away evil spirits.

This year's event received the support of Bruxelles Bienvenue, the city's communication and tourism agency in keeping with its goal to organize or support major festive, cultural or sports

events. The procession was held in collaboration with the city's government and police department, who closed roads while four towering Ogoh-Ogoh statues were marched down Main Street. The parade was manned by hundreds of Indonesian citizens, as well as Balinese Hindus from the Netherlands, France, Germany, Switzerland and Romania. The event was replete with colorful dancers, cheering crowds and traditional Balinese music, lead by the battering beat of *kendhang* drums.

.....  
**Time to celebrate:** *Ogoh-Ogoh is carried through the streets of Brussels*



**Feeding our food:** Cows can survive on a wide variety of plants, but have an inefficiently low energy conversion from what they eat

CANADA

## Spreading Ashes

IN JUST FIVE YEARS, A DIVERSITY of immigrating cultures have begun to change the way Canadians handle their dead. Not having a place to scatter ashes, Ontario's Hindu Federation worked with community members, conservation authorities and government officials to create the provincial guidelines of 2009, allowing ashes to be

scattered on land and water. According to an article in *The Star*, Ontario's funeral services, hospitals and government are adapting to needs of Hindus, Buddhists and others of diverse faiths. With this influx of Hindu tradition—and because of many other practical reasons—cremation rates in the area are up to 60 percent and rising.

ENVIRONMENT

## Meat-Eating's Large Footprint

RECENT RESEARCH, PUBLISHED in the *National Academy of Sciences*, suggests that the most effective way of mitigating the environmental cost of the American diet is to minimize beef consumption. Lead author Professor Gidon Eshel, from Bard College in New York, told *BBC News*, "We have a sharp view of the comparative impact that beef, pork, poultry, dairy and eggs have in terms of land and water use, reactive nitrogen discharge, and greenhouse gas emissions. The overall environmental

footprint of beef is particularly large because it combines a low production efficiency with very high volume."

The study notes that, compared with all other livestock categories, beef production requires about 28 times more land and 11 times more water, while producing 5 times the green house gases and 6 times the amount of nitrogen respectively. Moreover, the study shows that potatoes, rice and wheat only required one sixth of the resources of those other livestock.



**Back to nature:** Flowers and ashes float upon the water

TOP TO BOTTOM: METROBALI.COM; HERNANI LARREA; MAIRNEECOTOURS.COM



**Free yoga classes:** local regulars and passersby gather on Paseo de la Reforma for the Sunday morning guided classes

MEXICO

## Government-Sponsored Yoga

IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR, Mexico's Government of the Federal District chose to sponsor outdoor yoga sessions in Mexico City, through Mexico's Institute of Sports. The class, which is free to join, is held each Sunday at Paseo de la Reforma, a wide avenue that runs through the heart of the city.

As part of promoting physical activity, government officials hope that the classes will

improve the overall health of the public while disseminating the yogic ideals of wholeness and acceptance. These free yoga classes have become one of the most successful parts of the federal fitness campaign. One participant told *El Sol de Mexico* that "the classes are well taught, especially for beginners, and the atmosphere feels good because of the practice's peaceful message of coexistence."



**Murti installation:** Milk is poured on the main deity, Prasanna Venkateshwara, carved from black granite in India, before it's installation at the Hindu Temple and Cultural Center in Bothell. The main priest, Satyanarayana Acharyulu Narayana, left, leads the purification ceremony.

TOP TO BOTTOM: EL SOL DE MEXICO; MIRSOVET.RU; ALAN BERNER/THE SEATTLE TIMES

HEALTH

## Regenerating Fast

A RECENT STUDY FOUND THAT fasting for at least three days has significantly restorative effects on the body's immune system. According to an article in *Medical News Today*, the study, published in the journal *Cell Stem Cell*, was conducted by Valter Longo, Professor of Gerontology and the Biological Sciences at the University of California.

Beginning with studies on mice, Longo has now moved on to human trials with similar results. In mice, repeated cycles of

2-4 day fasts over the course of six months killed immune cells that were older and damaged while generating new ones from stem cells. He found that fasting seems to trigger dormant cells in the immune system into an active state of self-renewal. While fasting, the body uses its stored up fat, glucose and ketones while recycling defunct immune cells.

Longo's study is the first to show that a natural intervention can trigger regeneration of an organ or system through stem cells.



**Well worth skipping meals:** Fasting for as little as three days triggers the immune system's cellular regeneration response

USA

## Seattle Temple Opening

ON MAY 13TH, THOUSANDS of Hindus from all across Washington State gathered at the Hindu Temple and Cultural Center (HTCC) in Bothell, to witness the murti installation of the area's newest and largest temple. The installation followed three days of traditional maha kumbhabhishekam (consecration). According to a *Seattle Times* article, the Hindu population in the Seattle area has been booming, with many Indian software engineers immigrating to the area. Hindus in King, Snohomish and Pierce counties have increased from 20,000 to nearly 60,000 in just 12 years.

Mani Vadari, chairman of the HTCC's board, said, "This is a 27-year-old dream come true." Vice chairman, Nitya Niranjana, told *The Seattle Times*, "When we worship at home, our prayers go to us and our families first. When we worship here, our prayer goes to the universe first. This temple is about loving the universe." Prasanna Venkateshwara is the first of six more murti's which HTCC plans to install in the future. The Center has plans to build an even larger Siva temple on adjacent property, which, when complete, will be one of the largest Hindu temples in the US.





## SCIENCE

# Restorative Sandalwood Oil

ACCORDING TO A STUDY AUTHORED by Dr. Hans Hatt of Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Germany, skin cells can sense smell and respond positively to the application of synthetic sandalwood molecules. While it is well known that humans have these olfactory receptors in their nose, this is the first time such receptors have been found in the outermost layer of skin cells.

Dr. Hatt's research, which was published on July 8 in the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*, shows that when synthetic sandalwood scent is in proximity of these receptors, the receptors trigger a calcium-dependent signal pathway. This pathway ensures a quicker migration of

cells to damaged tissue. The activated receptors also caused a 22 percent increase in cell proliferation. Dr. Hatt told *Time* that this discovery could lead to further research in wound healing and even to applications for cancer, as T-cells—responsible for killing cancer cells—have olfactory receptors as well.

Hatt stated, "I feel a mission to convince my colleagues, and especially clinicians, that this huge family of olfactory receptors plays an important role in cell physiology." The healing affects of sandalwood oil may be a partial explanation as to why sandalwood is such a sacred substance for Hindus around the world.

## BRIEFLY...

**LAST JANUARY IN NORTHERN ITALY**, over a thousand Hindus participated in the Shoba Yatra Pego-gnaga. The event, organized by Shri Hari Om Mandir, included traditional plays, music, songs and prayer, with a long parade to Piazza Matteotti, where the festive crowd was greeted by the mayor, Dimitri Melli. Only recently was Hinduism recognized as an official religion in Italy.

**ON THE 15TH OF JUNE, IN** Australia, the first North Indian Hindu temple, social

welfare center and Indian cultural education institution of its kind opened its doors. Sankat Mochan Kendra will serve Hindus throughout the area.

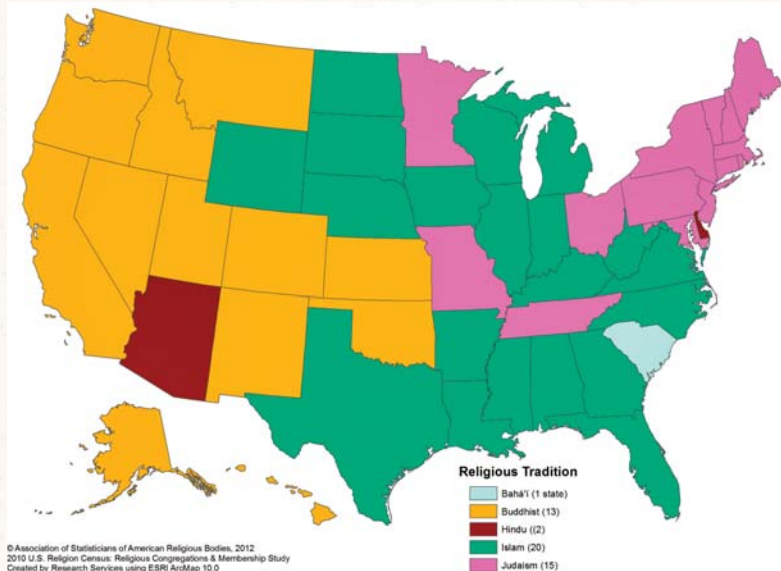
**ACCORDING TO AN ARTICLE IN** *The Hindu*, a recent UN report stated that New Delhi is now the world's second largest city, though its 25 million population trails far behind Tokyo's 36 million inhabitants. Recently, the number of mega cities (those with populations over 10 million) has risen

## USA

# Religions by State

A RECENTLY RELEASED REPORT by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, based on information gathered by the 2010 *U.S. Religious Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study*, provides a detailed overview of religious groups throughout the United States. While there are approximately 2.4 million Hindus in the US, the study showed

that over 80,000 of them live in the New York area alone. (In fact, 80 percent of all Hindu religious groups are located in large cities.) The study also showed that Hinduism has become the second largest religion in Arizona and Delaware, with populations in many other states growing steadily.



**New perspective:** In a predominantly Christian nation, this map offers a rare look at the second largest faiths in the US

rapidly. While there were ten mega cities in 1990, there are now 28. By 2030, the world is projected to have 41 mega cities.

**THERE ARE SOME 5,000 HINDUS** in the German town of Bielefeld, and they now have a new place to worship. The Hindu temple at Am Stebkamp has joined the Kalyana Thiru Murugan temple in Ummeln as a central feature of the area's Hindu community. The temple's priest, Sarma Iyer Parameswaran, said that soon the temple would be offering yoga and meditation classes.

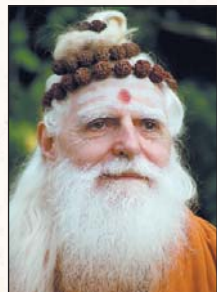
**IN EARLY JULY, SATGURU BODHINATHA** Veylanswami presided over the installation of a Muruga Deity at the Somnath Spiritual

Park temple at Grand Bassin in Mauritius. This initiative of the Sri Skanda Foundation, the Hindu House and the Spiritual Park at Rivière du Rempart saw the participation of a large contingent of devotees and community leaders.

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and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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## IN MY OPINION

# Receiving a Guru's Grace

The power behind the sacred Gayatri Mantra and the significance of initiation from a true teacher

BY DR. MADAS ARJUN RAO

IN SANSKRIT THE MEANING of the word *mantra* is interpreted as, "That which inspires the mind." The Gayatri Mantra reads as follows: *Om bhur bhuvah suvah. Tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi. dhiyo yo nah pracodayat.*

This mantra is an exemplary Vedic hymn, praising and glorifying God as a manifestation of the solar spirit (Savitur), who, as the source of life, light and warmth, came to be regarded as the Lord of cosmic creation and the life force within it. Hindu ritual is incomplete without the recital of the Gayatri Mantra. It has an indispensable role in all rites and rituals of Hindu society.

However, in order to derive the greatest results from the mantra, an aspirant must receive it from an enlightened guru. Received from such a guru, the mantra is charged with the power of his enlightened state of awareness and pure consciousness. The Gayatri Mantra then possesses tremendous potential to lead the aspirant on to deeper spiritual levels by guiding and inspiring his mind towards the attainment of life's greatest aim.

The Sanskrit meaning of *guru* is derived from the root words *gu*, meaning "darkness," and *ru* meaning "dispeller of." Hence, the guru is the dispeller of darkness. Here, darkness is ignorance. One who dispels the ignorance of his disciple is a guru. There is yet another meaning in the word. The syllable *ru* also stands for "light." Thus, the guru leads one from the darkness of ignorance to the light of wisdom.

In the real sense, the guru is an awakener of the soul of his disciple, showing him the way to Self Realization. He does not merely share his knowledge, but imparts to the disciple his very being and his spiritual illumination with it. His main task is to provide a glimpse of reality, awakening his disciple's consciousness and understanding of the real purpose of life.



The purpose of life is to realize the Absolute. In order to know the Truth, the mind must be prepared and purified. Hence, as a purificatory process, the primary task of the guru shall be to make the vision of his disciple brighter—removing the dust of ignorance from his eyes and cleaning the mirror of his mind. This slow process is essential for living a life

of clarity. This can only be achieved through sustained meditation, effectively creating a life of clarity and awareness.

However, these days finding a real guru—a *satguru*—is an extremely difficult task. Some pseudo spiritual gurus commercialize this sacred service for personal gains. They exploit and make a mockery of distressed and gullible people, who innocently approach them for spiritual guidance. Our scriptures speak well of this. In the *Kularnava Tantra*, we find the following passage:

*Many are the gurus who are perfectly proficient in the Vedas and Shastras; but rare is the guru who has attained the supreme truth. Many are the gurus on earth who give what is other than the Self; but rare is the guru who brings to light the Atman. Many are the gurus who rob the disciple of his wealth; but rare is the guru who removes the disciple's afflictions. He is the guru by whose very contact there flows the supreme bliss; the intelligent man shall choose such a one as the guru and no other.*

An enlightened guru imparts his own illumination, awakening the cosmic, *kundalini* energy of his disciple. Once it is awakened, all major obstacles on his path are dissolved. It is, however, important for the disciple to put in his own efforts and toil to achieve the best results from what he has acquired from his enlightened guru.

DR. RAO, 76, is a retired United Nations Administrative Officer and spends much of his time reading and writing religious articles.



# Path to Higher Consciousness

Exploring how following Hindu principles develops the refined character needed to move from anger and fear to lofty states of mind

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

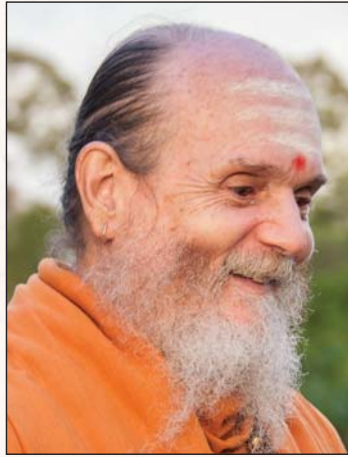
IT IS NOT UNCOMMON TO HEAR HINDUS ASK rhetorically, "Aren't all religions pretty much the same?" In fact, people of all faiths can be heard asking this. A related statement echoes this sentiment: "Living a virtuous life and helping your fellowman is the essence of all religions, isn't it?"

Our editors' study of the world's major religions, as presented in this issue's Educational Insight, finds similarities but also significant differences between religions. By presenting information on the world's religions in brief and easily comparable write-ups, the article seeks to dispel "the myth that all religions are one, that they all seek to lead adherents by the same means to the same Ultimate Reality." They don't, as a conscientious review of the article will show.

For example, from the Hindu perspective, it is not the attainment of heaven that is difficult. Remaining there is the challenge, as explained in the *Mundaka Upanishad*. After death those who have performed daily rituals and humanitarian works earn the grace of access to heaven. However, the merit of their good deeds is eventually exhausted, and they are once again born on Earth. The Upanishad offers two ways to remain in heaven and ultimately transcend that realm and merge in eternal oneness with God. The first is the attainment of a serene mind and controlled senses, which leads to renunciation of the world and the acceptance of a guru capable of guiding seekers to God Realization. The second path is retirement to the forest in one's elderly years, there to live in solitary, performing intense austerities and worship of a Deity. To the Hindu mind it makes sense that achieving a permanent stay in heaven requires more than mere virtuous living and humanitarian acts.

As the Insight mentions, "Hinduism is a mystical religion, leading the devotee to personally experience the Truth within, finally reaching the pinnacle of consciousness where man and God are one." Wikipedia's take on this, slightly edited by me, reads like this:

"Higher consciousness, superconsciousness and God-consciousness are expressions used in Hinduism to denote the consciousness of a human being who has reached a higher level of development and who has come to know reality as it is.... Evolution in this sense is not that which occurs by natural selection over generations of human reproduction but evolution brought about by the application of spiritual knowledge to the conduct of human life, and of the refinement of the mind brought about by spiritual practices. Through the application of such knowledge to practical self-management, the awakening and development of faculties dormant in the ordinary human being is achieved. These faculties are aroused by and developed in conjunction with certain virtues such as lucidity, patience, kindness, truthfulness, humility and forgiveness toward one's fellow



man—qualities without which higher consciousness is not possible."

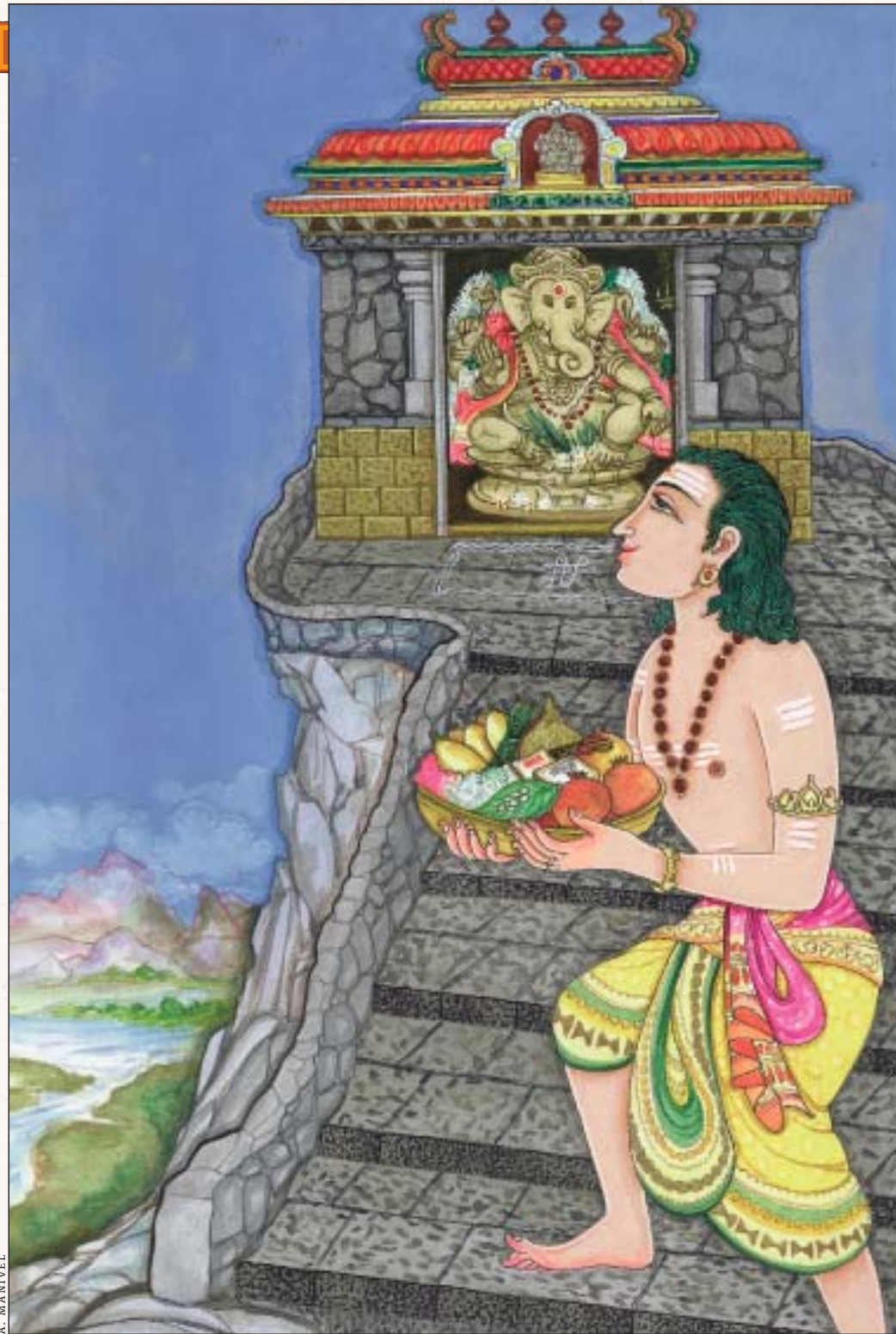
Let's look more closely at the word *consciousness*. Our Himalayan Academy lexicon describes it as "perception, awareness, apprehension. There are many layers or levels of consciousness, ranging from the ordinary, everyday consciousness of our body and mind to omniscient states of superconsciousness. Consciousness aware only of itself is Pure Consciousness."

The principles and practices of Hinduism are designed to help us ascend to ever higher levels of consciousness, moving out of negative states to positive ones, from positive states to creative ones and from creative states to divine knowing, the highest state, which is the unitive consciousness of soul and God. This happens in small steps, in a gradual approach, over a period of many lives.

The most common negative states of consciousness that Hindus work to overcome are fear and anger. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, gave a number of techniques for reducing and then eliminating altogether these powerful instinctive forces. He emphasized the worship of Lord Ganesha, the benevolent elephant-faced Lord of Obstacles: "Worship of Lord Ganesha is immediate. One has but to think of His form to contact His ever-present mind. Our great God Ganesha sits contentedly upon the muladhara chakra. This chakra controls the forces of memory within every creature. Worship of Him strengthens your memory, builds character and brings knowledge from the within. It also protects you from the lower forces which reside in the little-known chakras below the muladhara. These darker chakras govern fear, anger, jealousy and the confused thinking centered around self-preservation."

Progressing through levels of consciousness by applying Hindu principles and practices has similarities to the modern idea of self-improvement. It also has some important differences. It adds God and the soul as central elements. It also brings in the larger time frame required by reincarnation. We are looking for these changes to take place over a number of lives, and we know we have all the time we need to achieve our goals.

As in any system of self-improvement, it is important to start at the beginning. In the Hindu approach, that means focusing on our



Artist A. Manivel shows a seeker ascending steps to a small Ganesha shrine at the top of a knoll. With offerings in hand, he consciously works within himself to mold his life in accord with dharma, knowing that he must overcome the baser, instinctive emotions and reactions before gaining access to the divine states of mind his guru has spoken of.

Character is the sum total of mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual. On the spiritual path, the first phase of effort is to build, improve and transform our character.

The foundational importance of character is not limited to religion. A school of modern mental health called Positive Psychology states: "We have discovered that there is a set of human strengths that are the most likely buffers against mental illness: courage, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, hope, honesty and perseverance. Much of the task of prevention will be to create a science of human strength whose mission will be to foster these virtues in young people." (Prof. Martin Seligman, University of Pennsylvania, 1998)

In addition to cultivating those human strengths, we can renounce actions motivated solely by selfish desires—actions that give us additional pleasure, wealth or possessions but do nothing for our family, friends or associates.

Good character is rooted in duty. We all have certain duties to perform. The duties of those following the path of family life in Hinduism change according to age. This is called ashrama dharma. For example, in the second ashrama, grihastha, age 24–48, the primary focus is raising a family and fulfilling a career. Some think spiritual life draws us away from the world and our duties in it, but, in fact, duty well performed matures our spiritual search, and spiritual practices enhance the performance of duty.

Those sincerely striving for higher consciousness can add new activities to life that are purely selfless, helping others in truly giving ways, with no expectation of payment, presents, praise or prestige. This matures our character. Often such service is done at a temple or ashram, but it is wise and prudent to extend such altruism as widely in your life as you can, such as helping others in your workplace beyond what is expected, willingly and without complaint.

Selfless service has an added depth when it involves sacrifice, the giving up a cherished possession, be it money, time, intelligence or a physical object, to manifest a greater good. Sacrifice is similar to charity but has a touch of self-denial, such as fasting for a day and giving the money saved to a Hindu institution or giving up an expensive vacation for a budget vacation and donating the savings to charity.

Selflessness, dutifulness and overcoming fear and anger are all part of the great and difficult work of transforming our nature. As we achieve these, we are naturally led to devotional practices and meditative disciplines. Worship, meditation and the several yogas then open new possibilities for refining character and lifting our consciousness. Hinduism's gradational approach to mysticism requires patience. Correctly understood, this approach blesses us with the fulfilling knowledge that we are making tangible progress toward the eventual goal of God Realization, and averts any sense of frustration that we have not yet achieved it.

conduct and making sure it aligns with dharmic ideals. An appropriate place to start is with overcoming basic instinctive patterns, which can be thought of as belonging to the lower chakras. The ten classical restraints called yamas outline qualities that help control lower-consciousness tendencies: noninjury, truthfulness, nonstealing, divine conduct, patience, steadfastness, compassion, honesty, moderate appetite and purity. As we become established in these, more character refinements can be developed, such as courageousness, industriousness, joyfulness, observation and respect. This evolution of character is a natural movement from lower to higher consciousness.



## LETTERS

### Rishikesh

Aum Namō Narayanaya. We are very grateful to you for the nice write-up about the ashrams of Rishikesh in HINDUISM TODAY's Jul/Aug/Sep 2014 issue. The report is very balanced and informative, and one could see that great pain has been taken to present Rishikesh in a way that is accurate. The article is also a good guide for people who want to know more about Rishikesh and its ashrams. Our special regards to Mr. Rajiv Malik for his contribution and Dev Raj Agarwal who is an excellent photographer. Congratulations!

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### Enjoying Your Publications

I happen to have a hardcover copy of Himalayan Academy's trilogy of books on Siva. I enjoy them immensely. Every morning after my shower, I spend a few minutes reading these books and I am about to finish the first one, *Dancing with Siva*. After reading, I meditate on Lord Siva and Murugan who happens to be our family Deity. As a descendent of Sri Appayya Dikshitar about whom your books say so much, I am naturally attracted to the form and substance of Siva. HINDUISM TODAY is a delightful magazine and I am a lifetime subscriber to this wonderful publication.

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### Way of Life?

Your article "Hinduism: Religion or Way of Life" (Apr/May/June, 2013) is superb. Many times we heard this erroneous statement, "Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life," and we had questions in our minds about it. Your article has squarely answered this issue very well, removing the delusions in the minds of millions. It is better to say that Hinduism is definitely a religion, with a highly recommended way of life as described in the Hindu restraints and observances—the yamas and niyamas. If all the religious element were removed from Hinduism—which cannot be done—millions of people all over the world would suffer for obvious reasons.

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### Thank You

Namaskar, I have received the recent issue of HINDUISM TODAY. I am so appreciative of your magazine and would like to thank you so much. Here in Bangladesh, over 25 million people are Hindu. I do not know how many

read the magazine or know about it in Bangladesh, but I have benefited from the web issues regularly. Thank you again.

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### Loved the Articles

I got a chance to read HINDUISM TODAY magazine (Apr/May/June, 2014) last night and really loved so many of the articles and the care with which they were presented—"Anger Management" was very inspiring. The inside cover painting of the realization of the Absolute was brilliant. I loved that triptych so much that I had to cut it out.

NATALIE CEDERQUIST  
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### A Rich Symbol

Namaste. Can you please explain the following symbol used by HINDUISM TODAY?



JAY THAKAR  
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*It is symbolically rich. First, it is a set of quotation marks, to imply the writings, the articles and the opinion pieces in the magazine. Secondly, it is a cross-section of printing rollers, to represent the process of the press. And thirdly, it contains a reverse swastika to represent the auspiciousness of Hindu Dharma that is the essence of what we publish.*

### The Importance of Tilaka

Just as a temple, sacred place of worship or a prayer is vital for all religious people, so also are religious markings important—especially for Hindus. Almost all Hindu traditions have their independent, separate tilakas. They have interesting histories. There are about 80 types of tilakas, the most diverse are found in Vaishnava Sampradayas. These tilakas are important because they establish the identity of the followers.

Apart from their religious identifications, tilakas are the symbols of holy and sacred occasions, events and announcements. Hindu women put a red dot on their forehead to declare their marital status. In ancient India, after the demise of the ruling king, the new ruler was announced with a Raj-Tilaka. The

coronation ceremony was incomplete without putting this special mark upon the new ruler. Before going to war, soldiers were given send-offs by their wives or mothers by putting Vijay-Tilakas to wish them success. The same type of ceremony was performed when they returned home. Thus, tilaka was and still is a very important symbol in India.

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### On Humanism

In regards to the recent Publisher's Desk article, humanism has been very effective in popularizing the Socratic role of reason and the scientific method to understanding life, but it is incorrect in its assertion that man is the measure of all things. Man is, of course, not the measure, but necessarily must be the measurer since it is he who asks! Unable to step outside his consciousness, he cannot escape the subjectivism and become an unbiased scientific observer of himself or of life.

By deifying human reason, humanism merely substitutes one epistemology and subsequent search for Truth for another. It fails to impose its theistic skepticism on its own premises of reason and the certainty of truth. In that sense it is bad metaphysics—presupposing that there is Truth and that Reason is the path to the discovery of such Truth. The result is a dogma of anti-theism.

The philosopher Heidegger in his "Letter on Humanism" criticized humanism as claiming to reject the "superstitions of metaphysics," yet failing to acknowledge that position is in itself a metaphysical proposition. Nietzsche also criticized humanism as merely a popular secular theism, that responded to man's increasing skepticism of the need for God, substituting a new belief system for an older now much criticized one.

Positively, humanism does challenge individuals to examine ideologies rather than merely accept doctrines due to faith or culture or tradition. This healthy skepticism can lead to a more liberal interpretation, even humanistic or existential interpretation of events, but it can also result in discarding outdated and unhealthy ideas. One example is that few Hindus today subscribe to *Manava Dharma Shastra* (Laws of Manu) and its strict caste system. An example from Chapter 12: "If a wife, proud of the greatness of her relatives or her own excellence, violates the duty which she owes to her lord, the king shall cause her to be devoured by dogs in a place frequented by many." Or from Chapter 3: "Let him not marry a maiden with reddish hair." Our skepticism and willingness to challenge these ideas—framing them as

cultural traditions of specific times—allows us now to permit a man to marry a red-headed woman and inhibits our having wives devoured by dogs! Progress! Yet these specific changes in ideologies are admittedly an epistemic rejection of scriptural authority. Hence, the dilemma and great challenge—for not only students, but all of humanity—is to discriminate which authorities and traditions are to be challenged and which are to be sustained and accepted. Except for the strictest ideologies, few would argue that thoughtful skepticism is unhealthy for the individual and for society.

If we reject the notion of man as capable of pure rationality, then humanism fails in its acclamation that the application of reason and the scientific method of positivism can lead mankind to the attainment of unfettered knowledge. Establishing a system of ethics based solely upon "rationality," as Kant so valiantly tried with his categorical imperative, ultimately fails. It falters because such efforts are biased in their premise that man is a rational being, and thus fail to account for man's psychology—the emotions, instincts, impulses, needs, environmental conditioning, etc.—in sum, man's irrationalism. Relying totally on rationalism, as the humanist tries, will always fail to account for, or to comprehend, mysticism, spirituality and non-rational philosophical schools.

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### An Invaluable Effort

I just wanted to say its an extremely laudable

effort on your part, with relation to the magazine. I believe a greater circulation and greater awareness would be ideal in the spread of contemporary Hindu thought and tradition, in a world plagued by ignorance and intolerance. Do let me know in what way I may contribute intellectually in the Hindu Renaissance. I am an emergency physician in India who is also an aspiring writer. I believe firmly in the spread of our thought process. It would be wonderful if I may be able to contribute articles or my thoughts in this regard.

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### Non-Indian Hindus

Peter Beecham's letter in HINDUISM TODAY (Apr/May/June, 2014) has raised some very important issues about Non-Indian Hindus. Can anyone declare that they are a Hindu? Does any one person or group have the authority to deny or accept this person? What are the criteria to say that one is a Hindu and another is not?

Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism is not an organized religion. There is no single authority to decide on these questions. I am not a scholar or an authority but I would rely on following shlokas from ancient scriptures to guide us. I am sure some may not agree with what I have to say. But difference of opinion and debate are acceptable in Hinduism.

One shloka in *Ishopanishada* says that God resides in all—everyone and everything—in this universe. The energy that we call God is the common denominator in all. If all Hindus believe in this teaching, then anyone and

everyone who wants to can become a Hindu. Another shloka from *Mahopanishada* states: "A less-evolved person says, 'This is a friend. That one is not.' Whereas, to a spiritually evolved person, the whole world is a family."

When we are born, we cry when we are hungry or wet. We do not care if our mother had any sleep or food. As we grow up and evolve, we start thinking of our family, friends, community, etc. When we evolve spiritually, we find that we all have the same God within us and learn to love and care for everyone. Our views are always changing and hopefully evolving in the right direction. Those who discriminate against people of different races are young in their evolution.

A 2009 issue of *Newsweek*, published an article titled "US views on God and life are turning Hindu." The author says that more and more people are accepting the views of Hinduism in the US. There are millions of people all over the world who are practicing yoga. This is one of the steps for achieving the ultimate "yoga" or union with God. Even an atheist who does not believe in God can be accepted as a Hindu if so desired.

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Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

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107 Kaholalele Road  
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA  
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351  
or visit: [www.hinduismtoday.com/letters](http://www.hinduismtoday.com/letters)

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

## Yes, Together We Can Make the World More Peaceful!

Support Hinduism Today and help Hinduism's light shine out everywhere

WHY IS THE WORLD IN SUCH A MESS?" a Mauritian devotee asked Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva), founder of HINDUISM TODAY, in 1983. The guru answered with a trenchant "Because people don't live dharma."

For those present, the moment was electric. The world's most vexing, heavy-to-bear, perennial question had just been reduced to its simplest expression. Nothing is wrong with the world or with human nature, these simple words told us. It's not the fault of these people or those people. Rather, what is needed is for dharmic living to increase, wherein all of us can participate. Those beautiful souls who do their best to lead honest, selfless, sincere, worthy lives are already contributing much. And for those among them who yearn to have even more impact, they can do

it to their heart's content by supporting the world's dharmic movements and institutions.

HINDUISM TODAY has become known as a "global force upholding dharma." Why? Because it supports Hinduism, the most eloquent proponent of dharma, which is seen, more and more, as humanity's best hope.

We invite you to uplift the world by empowering today's and tomorrow's editors of our magazine, that they may go on doing what they do best: strengthen Hinduism and disseminate its golden, soothing principles of ahimsa, tolerance and endless wisdom. Please help us bring peace to the world. Give us your generous support; donate to the Hinduism Today Production Fund which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment at [www.hheonline.org](http://www.hheonline.org). Contact us at [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org) or call 1-808-634-5407.



**A global force for dharma:** Gurudeva at the United Nations on August 25, 2000, holds the U Thant Peace Award he had just received "for his contribution toward world peace in founding and developing Hinduism Today as a global force upholding Hindu dharma, to the benefit of Hindus and non-Hindus worldwide."



## QUOTES & QUIPS

# Prayer reminds me that I am not lost in a dream, but I am only dreaming that I am lost.

Swami Chinmayananda (1916–1993), founder of Chinmaya Mission

What is God after all? An eternal child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden. **Sri Aurobindo** (1872–1950), *Indian philosopher, yogi, guru and poet*

Ever afterward, though the dance of creation changes around me in the hall of eternity, I shall be the same. **Anandamayi Ma** (1896–1982), *God-intoxicated yogini and mystic Bengali saint*

If you desire to be pure, have firm faith, and slowly go on with your devotional practices without wasting your energy in useless scriptural discussions and arguments. Your little brain will otherwise be muddled. **Sri Ramakrishna** (1836–1886), *famed Hindu mystic*

A big storm may impede progress for a short

time, but in the long run it makes you a better sailor. *Anonymous*

So potent is the power acquired through disciplined self-denial that those who attain it may even delay the moment of death. *Tirukural 269*

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869–1948)

The worst thing you can do for anyone you care about is anything that they can do on their own. **Abraham Lincoln** (1809–1865), *16th president of the United States*

I don't want to believe. I want to know. **Carl Sagan** (1934–1996), *astrophysicist and author of Cosmos*

Each today, well-lived, makes yesterday a dream of happiness and each tomorrow a vision of hope. Look, therefore, to this day, for it and it alone is life. **Kalidasa** (5th century AD), *Classical Sanskrit writer and poet*

When you see with your inner eye, then you realize that you are God and not different from Him. **Shirdi Sai Baba** (1838–1918), *Indian saint and guru*

Should even one's enemy arrive at the doorstep, he should be attended upon with respect. A tree does not withdraw its cooling shade even from the one who has come to cut it. *Mahabharata 12.146.5*

We who have come from the East here have been told day after day in a patronizing way that we ought to accept Christianity because

Christian nations are the most prosperous. We look about us and see England as the most prosperous nation in the world, with her foot on the neck of 250 million Asiatics. We look back in history and see Christian Spain's wealth beginning with the invasion of Mexico. Such prosperity comes from cutting the throats of fellow men. At such a price the Hindu will not have prosperity. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902), *disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, at the Parliament of the World's Religions, 1893*

Devotion to the satguru is the one main prescription. Without this, all learning, all austerity, family status and observances are useless. They are only decorations, pleasing to the worldly eye. *Kulamava Tantra*

Emancipation from the bondage of the soil is no freedom for the tree. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941), *mystic poet*

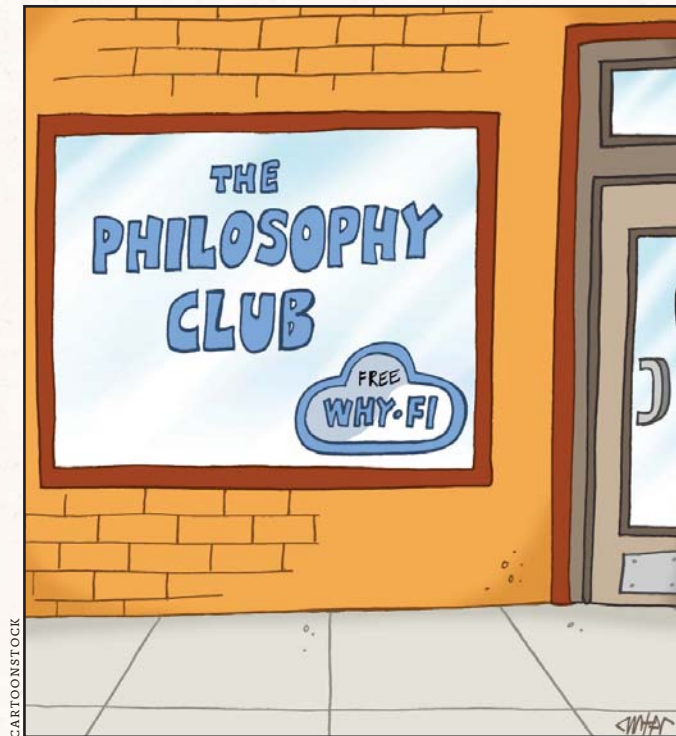
A leader is best when people barely know he exists. Of a good leader, who talks little, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say, "We did this ourselves." **Lao Tzu** (604–531 BCE), *Chinese philosopher*

I wish I could make him understand that a loving, good heart is riches enough, and that without it, intellect is poverty. **Mark Twain** (1835–1910), *American author*

If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. *African proverb*

Give me by all means the shorter and nobler life, instead of one that is longer but of less account! **Epictetus** (55–135 CE), *Greek Stoic philosopher*

Hinduism is focused on the present moment. It's not focused on what happens after we die, it's not focused on some future event, it's not focused on tomorrow, it's not focused on later today. It's focused on living in as high a state of consciousness as possible, right now! **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of HINDUISM TODAY



Spiritual destiny is manifested in the lives of those who stand out from the masses and actually do something, who live a creative life for the benefit of others. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001)

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Painting Gods

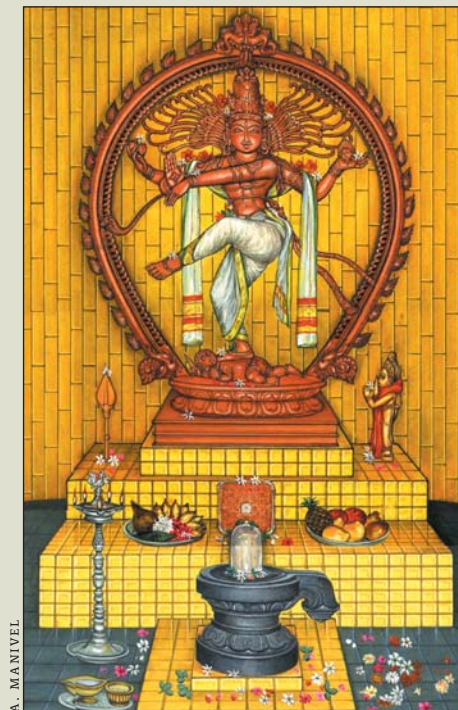
Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam Sivacharyar offers his response to the question of why it is preferred to paint a temple's inner sanctum, rather than photograph it.

THERE ARE SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN a good painting and a good photo. A kind of sacred power gets induced into a painting through the mind and meditation of the painter. Without deep meditation on the selected form or scene, a good painting cannot be accomplished. But no such meditation is involved while taking photographs, and the presence of sacred power seems to be absent in the photos. We can see this difference by looking at the painting of Sri Nataraja done by A. Manivel and any photograph of Sri Nataraja.

While painting, the painter selects the

essential items of the scene which enhance its beauty and depicts only these selected items. Such selection gives sanctity to the painted scene. But no such selection is made while taking a photograph. It plainly presents the scene without its power. The beauty of the scene is not enhanced. Photography is a mechanical activity; painting is absolutely a spiritual activity.

In view of these and other differences, painting a temple murti is permitted and a photo is not. The general view being held by the elders is that taking a photograph would spoil the sanctity of the image or shrine. But we cannot show any scriptural rule which prohibits the taking of photographs. According to the scriptural classification, there is one category known as *chitrabhasa* (paintings and drawings). Modern photos could potentially be included in this category, but care should be taken to see that the photos preserve the sanctity of the shrine.



## BASICS

### The Meaning of Life

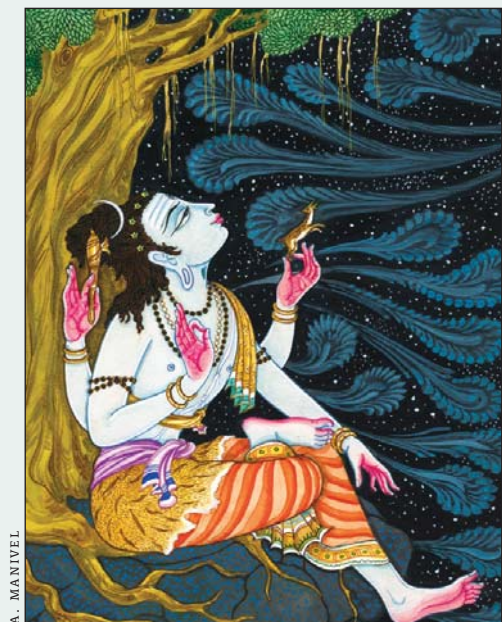
RISHIS PROCLAIM THAT WE ARE NOT our body, mind or emotions. We are divine souls on a wondrous journey. We came from God, live in God and are evolving into oneness with God. We are, in truth, the Truth we seek. We are immortal souls living and growing in the great school of earthly experience in which we have lived many lives.

Vedic Rishis have given us courage by uttering the simple truth, "God is the Life of our life." A great sage carried it further by saying there is one thing God cannot do: God cannot separate Himself from us. This is because God is our life. God is the life in the birds. God is the life in the fish. God is the life in the animals. Becoming aware of this Life energy in all that lives is becoming aware of God's loving presence within us. We are the undying

consciousness flowing through all things. Deep inside we are perfect this very moment, and we have only to discover and live up to this perfection to be whole.

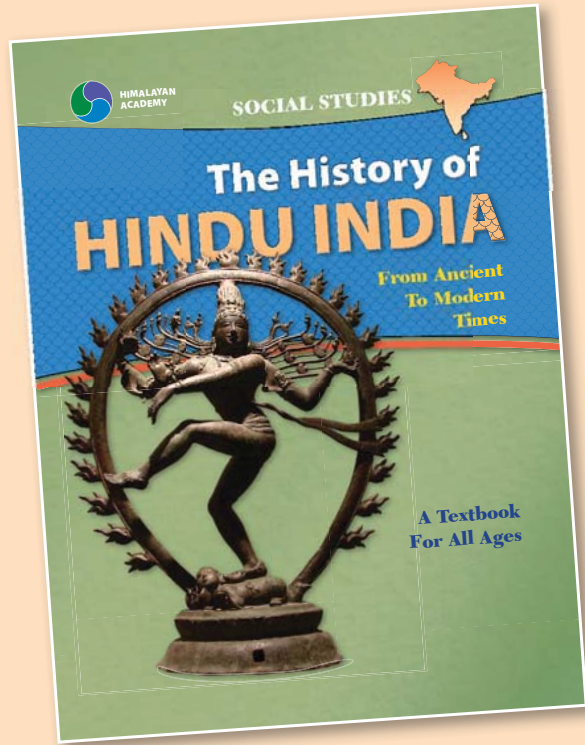
The ultimate goal of life on earth is to realize the Self, the rare attainment of nirvikalpa samadhi. Each soul discovers its Sivaness, Absolute Reality, Parasiva—the timeless, formless, spaceless Self God. The realization of the Self is the destiny of each soul, attainable through renunciation, sustained meditation and frying the seeds of karmas yet to germinate. It is the gateway to moksha, liberation from rebirth.

The Self lies beyond the thinking mind, beyond the feeling nature, beyond action or any movement of even the highest state of consciousness. The Self God is more solid than a neutron star, more elusive than empty space, more intimate than thought and feeling. It is ultimate reality itself, the innermost Truth all seekers seek. Because Self Realization must be



experienced in a physical body, the soul cycles back again and again into flesh to dance with Siva, live with Siva and ultimately merge with Siva in undifferentiated oneness. Yea, jiva is actually Siva.





# Finally, a Fair & Accurate Presentation of Hindu History for Children

**A 128-page sixth-grade social studies course from the editors of HINDUISM TODAY**

HINDUISM TODAY's Hindu history book is both correct and authentic, and definitely better than I have seen in any school textbook. If each Hindu were to learn and remember this narrative, the Hindu community would be better off in this increasingly pluralistic society.

Shiva G. Bajpai, Professor Emeritus, California State University Northridge

While no book can possibly encompass fully the breadth, complexity and plurality of Hindu practice and belief, the Hindu American Foundation finds that this work compromises little in describing the universal ideals of Hinduism that have emerged from its wondrous diversity.

Hindu American Foundation, USA

This presentation provides a needed counterbalance to textbooks on Hinduism which are sometimes inaccurate or fail to give a perspective that would be recognizable to most Hindus. Though designed for sixth-graders, I could imagine myself recommending it as review material for my college students.

Jeffery D. Long, Ph.D, Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Elizabethtown College, PA, USA



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FROM THE AGAMAS

# Revealing Scripture

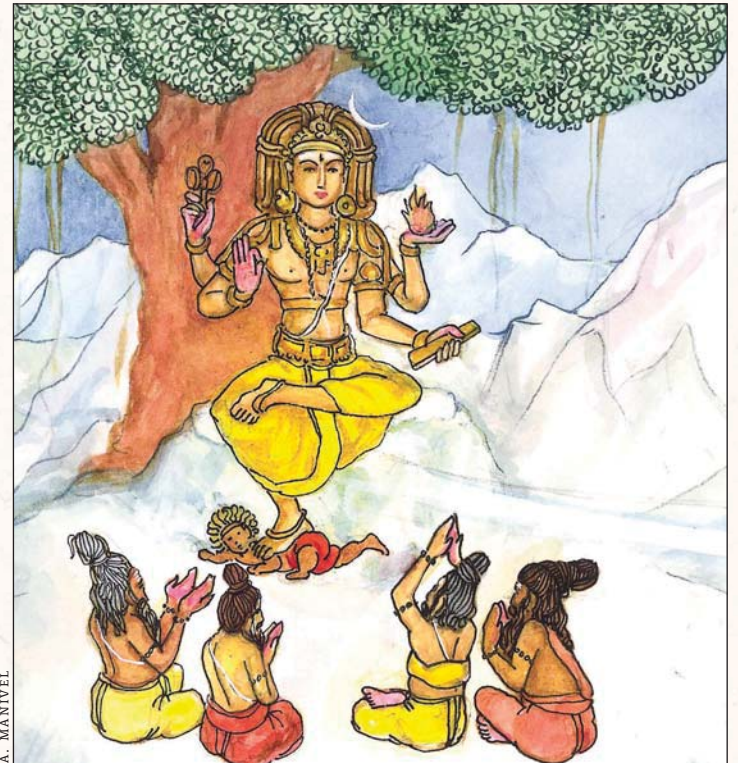
An esoteric introduction to the Mrigendra Agama unveiled by Lord Indra

*The following is a lucid translation of excerpts from the Mrigendra Agama, chapter 1, verses 5-17. At the hermitage known as Narayana Ashrama, great sages leading pure lives of austerities installed and worshiped a Sivalinga with concentrated heart and mind, invoking the vibrant presence of Lord Siva. Impressed by their diligence and sincerity, Lord Indra took the form of an ascetic and approached the hermitage. The sages welcomed Him with reverence. Indra then asked them to tell Him about their worship.*

THE SAGES REPLIED: "THE WORSHIP OF SIVALINGA, BEING PERFORMED by ascetics in order to attain their desired goals, is indeed an inevitable sadhana, ordained in the *Vedas* and the *Sutras* themselves. Even in the four *Vedas*, only Rudra has been mentioned as the principal Lord, existing as the purport of all words and mantras. Even in the *Kalpa* treatises, the directions for invoking Rudra's immediate presence have been set forth evidently."

Even though the sages amply explained their view on the importance of Linga worship, Indra—desiring to test their spiritual maturity and their grasp of Agamic wisdom—challenged: "Your scripture, which directs you to undertake activities such as the worship of the Sivalinga, is an outcome of misunderstanding. The knowledge gained through scripture is a myth—fruitless because the God who revealed the scripture is not different from the words which constitute that scripture. The Word itself should be considered as the principal Deity. If it is claimed the Deity has a concrete form, comparable to our own form, and that He and Word exist apart, then He is unable to exist simultaneously in various places where offering rites are performed. Therefore, the existence of God cannot be established. All proof expounded by those who argue for the existence of God—such as direct perception, inference and verbal testimony—are not valid to even a small extent. They do not serve the intended purpose. Verbal testimony of God is fruitless, because apart from the words of testimony there exists no distinct form or proof. And how could common worldly babble establish the existence of God?"

Having been pummeled by the surging waves of the ascetic's argument for atheism, the sages remained like a mountain, strong, unmoved and unaffected. One among them boldly countered, asserting that the all-powerful Divine form of Ishvara-Siva has a matchless capacity in the performance of cosmic activities. "The divine form of the Lord is never deteriorated, deformed or degenerated like our own bodies. Therefore, your statement that a being possessing a definite form cannot present himself simultaneously in various places is not justifiable. Once more, your argument that there is no Deity—Indra for example—that is separate from the word *Indra*, holds good, just as it would with the words such as *pot* or *moon*. Of course, the mere word *pot* could not fetch the water, nor could the word *moon* diffuse its cool, bright rays. Therefore, apart from these identifying words, there do exist the things that are named by them. How could words which denote actions and forms be inseparably one with those actions and forms themselves? All the courses of action would be deprived of their intended purpose if there were inseparable oneness between the words and the things or actions indicated by them. Your declaration that all things are unreal does not stand to reason,



**Atop Mount Kailasa:** *At the mountainous heights of consciousness, four sages receive divine teachings from Lord Siva*

since everything is governed by the relation of cause and effect. If the elements such as air and ether are unreal, how is it that they are dissolved and created again? They evolve from certain causal sources and are reabsorbed into them after a considerable lapse of time. So, they are real. Even common worldly usages cannot be set aside as baseless, since they are rooted in an age-old and valid tradition."

The sages became so delighted by this discussion that their eyes filled with tears of bliss. Seeing them in this state, Indra, deeply pleased, revealed to them His true divine form, scintillating with the brilliance of the rising sun and attended by hosts of celestial beings. On seeing this great Lord, the sages chanted His praise, reciting hymns from the *Rig*, *Yajur* and *Sama Vedas*, then prostrated before Him.

Indra addressed them: "Sages, choose a boon according to your wish, a boon considered to be the most supreme in the world." The sages asked that they receive instructions on the principles set forth in the *Saiva-Agama*.

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adi Saiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Shilpa Shastras*. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the *Mrigendra Agama*.





# Meet the Hindus of Java

For five centuries the Hindus of Central & East Java, today one million strong, have managed to preserve their unique ways in difficult circumstances

## SPECIAL FEATURE

### Indian epics, worship and beliefs arrived centuries ago

**T**HE HINDUS OF INDONESIA'S MOST POPULOUS ISLAND, Java, are today reduced to a few villages. They are remnants of the Hindu kingdoms which flourished here from at least 400 to 1500 ce. The Prambanan Temple started by the Sanjaya Dynasty is one of the largest in the world, and of exquisite design. But

Hinduism as found here today is largely a result of the nation's complex and fast-moving political and religious development since independence in 1945. In several cases, our reporter, Rajiv Malik, was only the first or second Indian to visit one of these small communities in the central and eastern parts of the island.



*Devotees of the Pura Sasana Bhakti in Pasung Village, Central Java, sing religious songs, chant mantras and worship according to the national Indonesian Parisada Hindu Dharma book (on the floor in front of each person)*

PRANAYOGAPHOTO.COM



BY RAJIV MALIK,  
JAVA, INDONESIA

**J**AVA HAS BEEN A PART OF HINDU TRADITION since ancient times, finding first mention in the *Ramayana* as Yawadvipa. It was one of the many places that Sugriva, ruler of the monkey kingdom of Kishkindha, sent his men to search for Lord Rama's wife, Sita, after her abduction by Ravana. For thousands of years it has been depicted in the Ramlila dance dramas (and lately in television serials) as a huge, lushly green forested area and known as such to every Indian child.

With 143 million people—equal to the entire population of Russia—Java is today one of the most densely populated places in the world. Its first major kingdom was that of Medang, founded in the 8th century by devotees of Lord Siva. Later kingdoms—both Hindu and Buddhist—thrived on the island until the advent of Islam in the 15th century. It was these kingdoms which built the spectacular Prambanan Hindu temple and the Borobudur Buddhist stupa, among the largest of their kind in the world. Both are World Heritage Sites.

Near the end of the 16th century, the Mataram Sultanate came into power in central and eastern Java, and the remnants of the Hindu Majapahit dynasty retreated to Bali, leaving behind only isolated pockets of Hindus. It was the ancestors of these Hindus—separated from their brethren in Bali by 500 years and from India even longer—that HINDUISM TODAY sought out.

I had been to Bali before, but never to Java; all I knew about it was what I'd seen in the

Ramlilas. Quickly, I found the Javanese people (including many Muslims) well aware of their place in the *Ramayana*, as well as in the *Mahabharata*. More so than even in India, these stories and characters are an integral part of local culture and traditions, and at a deep emotional level. Stories from both epics are enacted in popular *wayang* puppet shows and live dance dramas. In Bali I had witnessed a wayang performance of the *Mahabharata* being watched by thousands of Balinese Hindus of all ages in pin-drop silence. Local Hindus told me such shows are held all over Java as well, and include Muslim actors and dancers. The one difference between the regions' shows is that the dance performances in Bali are fast paced compared to those of Java.

With the help of journalist Gede Nguraha Ambara of *Media Hindu* magazine, we assembled a team to explore Java in April, 2014. Accompanying me for the entire trip would be Pak Dewa Suratnaya, a former accountant and guide for East Java and now a journalist associated with *Media Hindu*. Irawan, a Hindu teacher and native of East Java, was enlisted by Ambara as our guide for the first days. Photographer Agus Putu Pranayoga of Bali and I, Rajiv Malik of Delhi, completed the team.

### Two Renowned Prophecies

History tells us that last ruler of the Mahajapit Kingdom in Java, Brawijaya V, converted to Islam in 1478. For so doing he was cursed by his advisor Sabdapalon, who by his prediction would be reborn in 500 years during a time of corrupt politics and natural disasters,

and restore the Hindu and Buddhist Javanese religion and culture. Credence is given to the prophecy by the events of 1978 when the first new Javanese Hindu temples were built, and Mt. Semeru erupted.

The second prophecy is that of Jayabaya, the Javanese King of Kediri in East Java—one of the areas we visited. In the mid-1100s, he predicted, "The Javanese will be ruled by whites for three centuries and by yellow dwarfs for the lifespan of a maize plant (one year) prior to the return of the Ratu Adil (a dharmic king)." It was also said that Ratu Adil would return "when iron wagons drive without horses and ships sail through the sky."

Indonesia was ruled by the "white" Dutch from 1610, and ended with the "yellow" Japanese invasion in 1942. The Japanese themselves lasted three years—two more than the prophecy predicted. While leaving, they facilitated the establishment of the independent nation of Indonesia.

While Hindus in Java and Bali all know of these prophecies, they were little mentioned during our visit, for they imply a resurgence of Hindu, Buddhist and traditional belief at the expense of Islam, which is adhered to by 88 percent of the people. But faith in Indonesia is also dynamic, with ancient indigenous beliefs still influencing later Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic beliefs and practices. Especially, there is a deeply mystical side to all faiths here.

### Tengger and Mt. Bromo

My Ramlila concept of Java—a jungle flush with greenery—was shattered within minutes of landing in Surabaya, a veritable

jungle of concrete. It is the second largest Indonesian city and one of the busiest commercial centers in Southeast Asia. Our destination, the Tengger Hill region, is 145 kms southeast.

Java was mostly tropical rainforest prior to its dense settlement by humans. Over time, much of the rainforest was cleared, save for the highlands and some coastal areas, and the land used for highly productive agriculture, growing rice, corn, cassava, sweet potatoes, peanuts and soybeans. Palm oil, coconut, coffee and tobacco are also major crops. We passed through vast farmlands interspersed with well-developed small cities on the way to Tengger, traveling comfortably on the

country's good roads—better than in much of India, to my surprise.

Mount Bromo is a major tourist attraction of the Tengger region, drawing visitors from all over Asia wanting to see the spectacular active volcano where they can hike right up to the brim over the smoking caldera. Bromo—named for the God Brahma—is a sacred place for Hindus. In the 15th century, Princess Roro Anteng, daughter of the Majapahit King Brawijaya, and her husband, Jaka Seger, were among those who fled the tattering Majapahit Kingdom when the Islamic religion was gaining followers all over. This couple took refuge near Mount Bromo and developed a new kingdom named it Teng-

ger, using parts of their respective surnames.

Though the kingdom prospered, the royal couple could not produce an heir to the throne. In desperation, they climbed to the top of Mount Bromo and there prayed and meditated for many days. Popular legend says that finally, Brahma announced that they would be blessed with children, on the condition that the last born would be sacrificed back to the volcano. After they had 25 children and neglected the requirement, the volcano lured their last born, Prince Kesuma, to the mountain and consumed him in an eruption. From then on, to appease the volcano, the Tenggerese make yearly offerings on the day of Yadya Kasada ac-



## Mt. Bromo, the world's largest fire altar



(clockwise from top right): Map of Java island showing the areas visited for this report; the Balinese-style Pura Lahur Poten Bromo temple at the foot of Mt. Bromo on the morning of the Yajna Kasada celebration; satellite view of Mt. Bromo and the edge of the Sea of Sand; (inset) stairs lead up the side of Mt. Bromo volcano







**Monotheism:** The open-air Balinese style Pura Lahur Poten Bromo; (inset) atop of the central shrine, or padmasana, is an image of Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, the "All-in-One God" or "God Almighty," a monotheistic Deity introduced in the 1960s to fulfill a government requirement that, to be officially recognized, Hinduism had to be a "monotheistic" religion



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According to their lunar calendar. In 2012, this was held in August.

#### Ngadisari Village and Its People

Ngadisari (#1 on the page 21 map) is a picturesque town 45 km from the coast, hugging the side of the Tengger Volcanic Complex. At 6,200 feet above sea level it is much cooler than the plains below. The yearly tourist influx provides a supplementary income to the agricultural community, with many homes on the main road doing a brisk business as guest houses. Their rates, some running US\$100 per night, were high for Java, where a good hotel could be booked in most cities for \$25 to \$35/night. Hindu visitors should be aware that the Javanese of all religions are staunch meat-eaters; the vegetarian is likely to subsist on tea, milk, biscuits and fruit for more days than he would prefer. The visiting Hindu should also be prepared for two other cultural shocks: shoe wearing and cigarette smoking in temples.

The Tenggerese here number about 250,000, spread among 48 villages, according to Pak Dewa. They speak an ancient form of Javanese called Tengger, seldom used elsewhere in Java—a sign of their isolation since the fall of the Majapahit kingdom in the 15th century. In 1275 CE, the community was given exemption from all taxes on account of the important religious work they did. The area has recently been declared a national park to protect it from encroachment by loggers.

Driving around looking for our hotel, we came upon a breathtaking view of the steaming crater of Mount Bromo across the Sea of Sand, on which sits the Poten Hindu Temple we were to visit the next day. Out-

side some Hindu homes, we noticed distinctive Balinese style shrines, *padmasaris*, two to three feet high. This was one of the few places in Java we saw any external indication that a home was Hindu.

#### Meeting the Tengger Chief Priest

We had a morning appointment with the chief priest of the area, Dukun Sutomo. *Dukun* or *Romo*, is the title given here to a priest, and means the same as *Ida Pedanda* in Bali and *pandit* or *brahmin* in India. Humble, down to earth and a gracious host, he came dressed in his official, traditional priestly attire, complete with batik cap. He took us around his home and explained how he offered tea, coffee, water, food and even cigarettes each day to the Gods and his ancestors at an altar in his worship room.

Sutomo is chief priest for Mount Sumeru, Mount Bromo and Tengger. Under him are 48 priests responsible for daily and periodic religious rituals, including the annual Kasada festival and the Unan Unan held every five years during the Tenggerese lunar "leap year." These priests gather twice yearly to plan the festivals and discuss important issues.

All the them, including Dukun Sutomo, are primarily farmers, which provides their main income. Sutomo said his days are spent on his agricultural land unless he is called upon to serve as chief priest. Compared to Bali or India, the ceremonial worship here is relatively simple and inexpensive.

Sutomo told us, "My father and grandfather were also priests. When my father died, the community asked me to take up his position. Hindus have been in Tengger for a long time. Our ritu-

als and life are very simple. Hinduism here is a combination of Saivism and Buddhism called here 'Siva Buddha.' When I work as a priest, I am performing my duty, not to make money."

#### The Bali-Java Issue

Until the 1960s, Hinduism was not recognized as a religion in Indonesia. Under the country's political philosophy of Pancasila ("five principles") a religion could be recognized only if it was monotheistic in the Muslim and Christian sense of the term. To meet the requirement, leaders in Bali—after some theological musings—adopted *Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa*, "God Almighty," a name originally introduced by Protestant missionaries in the 1930s. The Balinese form of this Supreme Being resembles a Sun God (see page 22 top left) and has the attributes of the transcendent Brahman or Siva. He is called *Acintya*, "the inconceivable" in Sanskrit.

Thus duly monotheized, Hindus of Bali received official recognition under the Hindu banner in the 60s. At the same time, Indonesians adhering to tribal faiths long ago influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism also opted to be declared Hindus. Those without an official religion could be suspected as communists and subject to persecution and even murder.

The *Indonesian Parisada Hindu Dharma* was formed to officially represent Hindus to the government. It promoted Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa and developed standardized forms of worship to be followed by



(left to right) Mangku Sugono, priest of the Pura Lahur Poten Bromo temple; Stone nature spirits stand guard around the base of the shrines; Dukun Sutomo, chief Tengger priest



## Ancient worship & recent innovations at Mt. Bromo





(Clockwise from above) Entering the Pura Dharma Bhakti, a Balinese-style temple in Ngadasari Village built by the government and dedicated in 1989. Inside the pura, a painting of Lord Siva adorns the back wall. The multi-tiered padmasana outside the building is the focus of worship. The back of the padmasana is adorned with a carving of Lord Vishnu riding on Garuda. Similar puras were built by the government in Java villages with a substantial Hindu population in the 1980s and 90s.



## Understanding the Balinese-style pura vis-a-vis the Tenggerese sanggar

(Below) The Pura Dharma Bhakti was built directly in front of the existing Tenggerese sanggar at the base of the tree on the right. (Right) A close up of the swastika-decorated sanggar where offerings are made to the guardian spirits of the village. Such shrines are widely found at the edge of each village in a grove of trees, usually spruce, cottonwood or banyan. Local Tenggerese displeased with the placement of the pura made a separate pathway so they could reach the sanggar without going through the pura.



priests. It also created graded presentations on Hinduism to be taught in public schools by Parisada-trained teachers. In the 1980s and 90s, Balinese-style temples called *puras* were built in East and Central Java in every Hindu community and staffed them with local Javanese who were trained as priests in Bali. It was common to place these puras next to existing traditional *sanggars* (see page 24). *Sanggar* means "gathering place" and comes from Sanskrit *sangha* meaning "assembly."

Dukun Sutomo addressed this issue circumpectly: "As far as learning Hinduism from Bali is concerned, we do not do so, as we have our own ancient traditions and rituals which we have to follow. At the same time, we do not feel or say that our Hinduism is better than that of Bali—we never compare that way. There are three traditional sanggars in Ngadasari and two puras. People offer

prayers in both, as they cannot forsake their ancient sanggar tradition."

Our guide, Pak Dewa, who spent several years among the Tenggerese and well understood their view of things [sidebar, page 25], confided, "The Balinese feel that their style of Hinduism is the right one and all others are incorrect. They have tried to change the other forms of Hinduism found here in Indonesia, and build temples only in Balinese style. Around 30,000 Hindus changed their religion and converted to Islam because of their unhappiness over Balinese-style Hinduism being forced on them."

"We have no connection with India," Dukun Sutomo went on. "I have not heard of any saint from there coming here. I do know the River Ganga is in India and we chant mantras in which all the sacred rivers of India are mentioned. I studied *Ramayana* and *Maha-*

*bharata* with my father. I have *lontars* of mantras and scriptures. These are something very personal; I cannot show them to you."

He said that relations with other religions are good. In the case of a Hindu girl marrying a Muslim boy, it is expected that the boy will convert to Hinduism. It is rare that the girl converts to Islam, but in either case the families will maintain good relations.

Dukun Sutomo concluded our interview with his message for Hindu youth: "I tell them to always try to learn about Hinduism and be a good Hindu. They must practice Hindu traditions and rituals. I tell them to never forget their ancestors and the path shown by them."

### The Sea of Sand

Switching to a Toyota Land Cruiser, we set out on the rugged drive to Pura Luhur

## Voices: Pak Dewa Suratanya Defends the Tenggerese Traditions

THE MAIN PROBLEM HERE IN INDONESIA IS NOT CONVERSION BUT that the Balinese Hindus would like the Hindus outside Bali—in Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan—to adopt their form of Hinduism. That is why some of our own Tenggerese Hindus converted to Islam. They were unhappy with Balinese-style Hinduism being forced on them—and I say this as a Balinese myself. The Tenggerese have as their main Gods Brahma, represented by fire and called Sanghyang Geni in Javanese; Vishnu (water), called Sanghyang Banyu; and Isvara/Siva (wind) called Sanghyang Bayu. They have their own styles of temples, priests, scriptures, calendar and rites of passage from birth to death. They are people with a strong identity of their own and that is the reason that—despite outside pressure—they are maintaining their culture and identity.

Such pressure continues to this day. Just a week back a Balinese priest from Surabaya said the Tenggerese do not have a place for God or sacrifice to the devas. That is not true. I started to oppose this kind of pressure three years ago and took a stand that there should be no more intervention from outside. The Tenggerese want to follow the rituals of their ancestors, such as Kasada Yagna. As in Bali, many rituals include animal sacrifice, usually a chicken or an egg. They do not have the tooth filing ceremony of Bali, but they do have *sunat*, a ritual cutting of hair for children. The dead are buried, with a symbolic cremation being part of the Enam-Enam ceremony. In Bali, the dead are first buried, then exhumed after some time and cremated, or left buried. It is not known how these practices arose in either place.

The Tengger form of worship is simpler than in Bali or India. In Bali, the puja ceremony is much longer and more complex. The Balinese priest will follow the pattern set by the Parisada: 1) puja and mantras with empty hands addressed to the transcendent Brahman, Nirguna Brahman, or the unthinkable; 2) puja with white flowers addressed to Shiva Raditya, the Lord of the Sun, as witness to the puja; 3) puja with red flowers addressed to the Istadewata (one's chosen Deity) and to ancestors as a form of respect; 4) puja with colorful flow-

ers or with Kwangen (Trimurti symbols) as a request to be given a gift; 5) puja again with empty hands, as an expression of gratitude to transcendent Brahman, Nirguna Brahman, or the unthinkable. In Tengger, they put the emphasis on the power of the secret mantras while making simple offerings of food and fruits. In both places the mantras are in Sanskrit and Old Javanese (Kawi) along with some in the local language. Old Javanese itself is highly influenced by Sanskrit. Of the 25,500 entries in a 1982 dictionary of Kawi, 12,500 are Sanskrit loan words.

The Tengger public schools teach the Trikal Sandhya system of worship developed in Bali with Gayatri and other mantras recited three times a day. As well, they have classes in Hinduism every Saturday. Our guide here, Irawan, has a doctorate in education and supervises 22 teachers of Hinduism in this Pasuruan district.

The religion of the Tengger only became an issue after the 1965 anti-communist purge in which half a million people were killed. It was in 1967 that efforts were made to identify the various religious groups in the nation and enforce the national belief in "one God." Before 1965, the area was known as Budo, or Buddhist, but when the officials came in 1967, the Tenggerese affirmed that they were Hindus, demonstrated some Hindu rituals and showed the ancient palm-leaf manuscripts (*lontars*) of their Hindu tradition.

For the Tenggerese, Mt. Bromo is the biggest fire altar in the world. During the Kasada

festival, they offer what is grown on their farms. There used to be 25 sacred places in this area, but many of them are forgotten. Every five years here is a the Unan-Unan festival in which they perform prayers for the purification of the entire world. As many as 50,000 people may attend in each locality where it is held. Once a year they celebrate Karo in honor of their ancestors. They also have smaller festivals every month or six months.

The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are very popular here. The people try to mold their life on the characters of these epics. The area is said to have a zero percent crime rate.







Poten temple (#2 on the page 21 map), at the foot of Mount Bromo on the Sea of Sand in the Tengger caldera. One gets there by driving a few miles past Ngadasari village to a ridge which drops off hundreds of feet down into the circular 20-square-mile caldera. In the period since the peak of the volcano collapsed, four new volcanoes, including Mt. Bromo, have erupted from its floor.

We were overwhelmed by the raw beauty of this desolate place, with its rugged vol-

canic peaks, gravel plains and Sea of Sand. There were about 100 people there when we arrived, mostly tourists, including a group on motor bikes. Some were taking the trail on foot or rented horse and then climbing the stairs up to the rim of Mt. Bromo, for a glimpse of the steaming crater.

An ancient shrine is here for Prince Kesuma, who is honored during the Kasada festival when the Tengger people pilgrimage to the top rim of Mt. Bromo, to offer rice,

fruit, vegetables, flowers and livestock into the volcano. Prior to the trek, they worship at the Pura Luhur Poten temple for blessings of Sang Hyang Widi Wasa and the celestial Mount Mahameru. It is believed that the mountains of Central and East Java are the results of the Gods transporting the original Mount Meru of the Himalayas to Java.

Pura Luhur Poten, completed in 2001, is an open temple (see photo, page 22) in what Pak Dewa called East Java style, with various



shrines, buildings and enclosures. The main sanctum faces away from Mt. Bromo, as do all temples of the area.

A group of Balinese pilgrims were here when we arrived. One, Made Pande Auka, said, "We came to do puja in this temple because the God here is Lord Brahma, who created the world and whom we greatly revere."

The temple priest, Mangku Sugono, told us the temple has four priests who work on a rotation basis. He serves three days a week from 7am to 5pm and tends his farm the rest of the week. "I learned Hinduism in the elementary school in Tengger," he said, "and then went to Bali for orientation in Hinduism. I have two girls and they can become priests if they want to. This is a very powerful temple. When we sit here and meditate on God we can connect to Him very easily. This is a Brahma temple directly connected to Mt. Bromo."

#### Worship of the Ancestors

That evening we were fortunate to attend an Entas Entas ceremony in honor of one's ancestors at the Ngadisari Village community center. Dozens of men, women, boys and girls had assembled for the ceremony. They were accompanied by hundreds of family members, many enjoying a lavish feast in the adjoining halls. The event was being recorded by a crew of young videographers.

A few priests recited mantras and performed rituals as each individual representative of a family sat in front of a clay pot wrapped in green leaves and decorated with flowers (see inset photo on p. 27). This is called *puspha lingga* and represents the atman or soul of the deceased. Next to the



## Tenggerese ancestor worship and daily life



(counter-clockwise from top left) Entas-Entas ceremony in Ngadasari Village honoring ancestors; entrance to Pura Sasana Bhakti in Pasung Village; this temple's main shrine is called a padma chandi, a Javanese style of padmasana; girls take a texting break from music practice at Pura Kerta Bhumi in Bongso Wetan Village; a bountiful roadside vegetable stand; Pak Dewa with a puspha lingga





puspha lingga are placed offerings and provisions to facilitate the soul's journey to heaven: money, cigarettes, a cooked chicken, rice, coconuts, sweets and fruits.

Once the ceremony is complete and festivities over, the puspha lingga is taken to the outskirts of the village to the *sanggar ped-anyangant* ("gathering place of village guardians"), and burnt as an offering. Pak Dewa said that in the days of the Hindu kingdoms, only the royalty was cremated; everyone else was buried. This is still current practice, following tradition, not an adaptation to the presence of Islam.

Unlike in India where the ceremony would usually be done by the eldest son, any relative can make the offering, including the young boys and girls. Overall it was a far more profound and impressive form of ancestor worship than I had ever seen in India.

### Pura Agung Dharma Bhakti

Our last stop in Tengger is Pura Agung Dharma Bhakti (see page 24) of Ngadisari village in the foothills. The pura is a large Balinese-style temple built right in front of and now obscuring a traditional Tenggerese sanggar. Though most Tenggerese still worship at the sanggar, according to Pak Dewa, the pura and sanggar harmoniously coexist. However, he said, the Tenggerese in their hearts did not like the imposition of the pura on them and the relegation of the main ancient sanggar to the background. But in Tenggerese tradition, they remained silent and did not oppose the construction of the Balinese structure. This is a stark example of the Balinese impact here.



Emuk Chandra

We encountered near here a row of private houses with small padmasari ("essence of the lotus") shrines in front of them—another Bainesian innovation. These were rare outside of Tengger, as most Hindus do not want identification on their homes. One Hindu lady, Emuk Chandra, said she worships at her shrine daily by offering rice.

The next day we visited Bongso Village in Gresik (#3 on the page 21 map). From now on, we would be either in places with minority Hindu population, or at archeological sites with few Hindus living in the vicinity. Bongso, we learned, is a Muslim area with just 670 Hindu residents with roots in Madura Island, off the coast from Surabaya city and near Bali. Madura Island does

not have fertile land as does Java, so many Maduranese, both Hindu and Muslim, migrated to other areas of Indonesia.

We were met by a small group of local Hindu leaders at the Pura Kerta Bumi, built in 1992. This is not only a temple, but also an ashram. A number of Hindu youth were singing bhajans accompanied by a gamelan orchestra as one would find in Bali. Here worshipers take off shoes before entering, a custom uncharacteristic of most temples we had been in so far.

The main Hindu festival here is Nyepi, the day of silence famously observed in Bali when no one works, eats, speaks or even leaves their home. The priest, Mangku Saptono, explained that just prior to Nyepi is the Melasti ritual, held to purify water resources: lakes, rivers and the ocean. Then follows the Ogoh Ogoh festival, likewise popular in Bali, held to bring victory over the evil powers of the area. The parade of life-size statues of demons ends with them all being burnt. Pak Dewa questions what this has to do with religion and said the general feeling is that it is mostly for entertainment. A culturally positive aspect of Ogoh Ogoh, however, is in the pre-ceremony feast to which all members of the Muslim community are invited.

Another popular festival is Tawur Agung, done for the prosperity and welfare of the world community (like the Tenggarese Unan Unan festival), as well as an expression of gratitude to the Earth and an apology to nature for human exploitation.

Mangku Saptono explained that in addi-

tion to worship, young people come in the afternoons to practice devotional music and attend classes in Hinduism. Kartika, 19, said, "I love Hinduism because of its rituals and culture." Others present expressed similar sentiments. Several young men are training to be priests. Each week Mangku Saptono conducts puja in a local Hindu home, and many people gather to attend. Asked about India, he told me, "Only once before has an Indian come here. You are the second to visit." Interaction is mostly with Bali, traveling there regularly and following the Balinese ways of worship. During puja some of the Gods local to Java are worshiped so part of the liturgy is in Javanese in addition to the Sanskrit.

### Kediri

We reached Kediri (#4 on the page 21 map) that evening. From 1045 to 1221ce this was the center of the Kediri Kingdom which ruled most of Central and East Java. It was followed by the Singhasari rulers (1222-1292) and then the Majapahit kingdom (1293 to 1500). King Jayabhaya ruled here from 1130 to 1160 and made the prophecies mentioned earlier. Javanese classical literature developed under the Kediri Kingdom, which maintained active trade and cultural exchange with India. Today it is a major center of sugar and tobacco production, with one tobacco company alone, Gudang Garam, employing 40,000 people. They are a maker of Java's famed *kretek* or clove cigarettes which so many smoke here. The Kediri Regency's seal includes Lord Ganesha, though this is a Muslim majority area. It is estimated there

are 12,000 Hindus in the regency, which has a population of 15 million.

Bangsongan village, 30 kms from Kediri, is a stronghold of the Hindu community. At the village temple we are greeted by local leaders led by two priests, Romo Dharmo Widjaya and Romo R. Andik Sahuri. The home of Romo Widjaya is just opposite the pura. He has a prominent Hindu *candi bantar* shrine outside his home.

According to Pak Dewa, the temple here is a *candis* not a pura. It was built seven years ago following what Romo Widjaya called "a divine guidance" and follows Javanese Hindu tradition. It is called the temple of Maja-pahitan, as the people who built it claim to descend from people of that kingdom. *Maja-pahit*, we are told, names the forests of maja fruit which grew prolifically when the kingdom was formed. The maja, *aegle marmelos* is also called bilva, bael and wood apple.

Romo Widjaya works as a spiritual healer, and that is his main source of income. His wife teaches Hinduism in a government school. "At the temple here," he explained, "we daily offer tea, coffee and water for our ancestors. We do puja for the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, and other Gods as needed—Lord Indra, for instance, if we need rain. Here the Javanese style of temple is called *candis*, and the Balinese style *pura*; Hindus worship at both. We have good relations with the Hindus of Bali, but our rituals are different and, we believe, more meaningful."

They are not in touch with Hindus in India and no one from India has ever visited them before now. "I think we should go to India," he said, "do some meditation and come back

here with enhanced spiritual powers. Combining the spiritual vibrations of the Hindus of India and Java will lead to the greater welfare of Hindus in both countries."

He spoke of people here who follow the Kejawen religion, which is based on ancient Javanese religions and influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism and Sufi mysticism. "Their identity cards will say 'Muslim,' but they do not go to mosques. They would rather go to the temples. Some come here to learn about Hinduism and meditation from me."

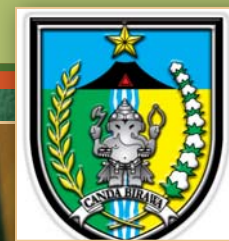
### Klaten

We left Kediri in the afternoon of the 21st and reached Klaten, (#5 on the page 21 map) in Central Java at night. Our first meeting was with Hendratta Wisnu and his wife, Cening Rahmawati. An architect by profession, he is head of the local Parisada branch. He said at one time the Hindu population of the area was 70 percent, but is now just 2 percent. Following the mid-1960s' violence against the communists, followers of Kejawen concluded they would find more freedom of faith within Hinduism than Islam and so declared themselves Hindus. But they were uncomfortable with the Balinese-dominated Parisad, and switched back to Islam as politically more practical. According to Pak Dewa, the number of registered Hindus in all of Java went from two million to one million at this time.

At present, according to Wishnu, there are some 16,000 Hindus in Klaten Regency. Most are Saivites and conduct their rituals according to Javanese tradition. They have 47 puras, 15 ancient Javanese temples, 100 priests and



(left to right) Puppet characters from the Mahabharata on the wall of Pura Giri Mulyo in Sandiyasan Village; ornate Ganesha at Bongso Wetan Village temple; a popular vegetarian sweet srobi in Klaten; coffee was introduced and exported from Indonesia in the 1600s by the Dutch (hence its nickname, "java"), and is still a major export product; (inset) the Kediri Regency seal featuring Ganesha



## Javanese traditions





140 teachers of Hinduism.

Our main destination here is the Prambanan Temple, one of the largest Hindu temples in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site (#6 on the page 21 map). It was built in 864 by King Pikatan of the Mataram dynasty and abandoned around 1000ce when nearby Mount Merapi erupted with such force as to cover all of Central Java with ash, forcing a mass exodus to East Java. Restoration was done in the 20th century, first by the Dutch, then by the Indonesian government. For me, the visit here was depressing, as so much was damaged by earthquakes, looting and vandalism over the centuries. Still, it remains a most impressive place, one we will describe in detail in the next issue of HINDUISM TODAY along with the other ancient sites we visited during our tour.

### Pasung Village

We drove next to Pasung Village (#7 on the page 21 map) to meet with the local Hindu community at the Pura Sasana Bhakti, built in 1992. Here we were greeted by two dozen men and women—the men in Western dress, the women in their traditional colorful, graceful Javanese garb.

The group was engaged in worship, chanting bhajans and mantras in Sanskrit and Javanese from small booklets. Three priests conducted puja, offering fruits, flowers, peanuts and other food to the Gods, then sprinkling holy water on everyone present.

Sukardi, the community leader, exclaimed, "It is a pleasant surprise to have someone from India. We conduct puja here each day, plus have educational activities for the children, which we hope will advance Hinduism in this area. We are trying to preserve the ancient culture by doing the prayers in the Javanese way, as you have just seen. Hinduism is gradually growing here. Not many people here know much about India, and therefore do not desire to visit it. We do have a connection with Bali, but do not go there to learn Hinduism. If Indian teachers came here, we could learn yoga from them."

Everyone was familiar with the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, which they learned from the wayang puppet shows. They believe the heros of those epics had come to Java, and that since it was too far to travel on foot, must have used some kind of airplane in those ancient days.

While leaving, I noticed a Muslim cemetery next to the pura. Pak Dewa explained: unfortunately, in some places cemeteries have been deliberately placed next to Hindu temples to defile the environment. The government has not stopped the practice.

I was pleased to be fed to a local dish called *srabi* by Wishnu and his wife. Introduced here by a Chinese lady decades ago, it is a vegetarian sweet made of rice flour, coconut and banana. It became a mainstay for me during the stay in Klaten.

### Demping Village

Our next stop was Demping Village (#8 on the page 21 map), home to 250 Hindus, near the 15th century Candi Ceto temple on the western slope of Mount Lawau, 3,000 feet above sea level, and connected with the Mahajapit Kingdom. We visited the home of Romo Widodo, where we interviewed Romo Jitho, the chief priest of this area. The walls of the house were adorned with pictures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses; for a moment I thought I was in India.

"Most of the people of our village are Hindus," Romo Jitho began. "This is the only village in Karanganyar Regency with a majority of Hindus. Christians and Muslims come here to preach. We welcome them and listen to them, but never follow them. I am the head of the 30 priests who function in the Lawu area around the Ceto Candi temple. Each priest performs all the rituals, including funerals. As in Bali, there are a lot of rituals, but they are not so costly here."

"The main God worshiped here is Siva; however Buddha is also worshiped. We have 13 puras, where puja is performed every five days (the Javanese calendar includes a five-day 'week'). Every day people offer flowers, incense and water to the Gods in their home temple—that is called *manushya yagna* meaning for the benefit of the people. The temple puja is called *deva yagnas*, for the Gods. For the worship in the pura, we follow the *Sangkalputih Shastra* which is also fol-

lowed in Bali's Besakhi Temple. The priests here gather from time to time and discuss their training, performance and problems."

"It is not required that one's father be a priest for one to become a priest. I learned Hinduism from experience, from my teacher, a senior priest in Jakarta, and from various scholars and pandits. I would prefer that my children not become priests, because this can be a difficult life. I think future priests will be selected by the universe itself."

As with everyone else we spoke with, he would not be drawn into the topic of Javanese-Balinese relations. "In many ways we have separate cultures," he said, "but that does not mean there should be any conflict. We are open to guidance from Bali if it is needed. It all depends on the situation. It is difficult to say what we could learn from India either, but India could learn Javanese culture from us."

Romo Jitho told me how the principal of a local government school issued instructions for all girls to wear a veil as the Muslims do. This prompted him to visit the school and inform the principal that our culture and tradition does not allow use of a veil. The order was withdrawn and the principal apologized. "We are safe here despite the Muslims being in the majority. We are not afraid of them and forcefully keep to our point of view in debate, bringing them around to our point of view."

Our next stop was the Pura Bhakti Wi-

dhi temple, about 70km from Klaten, (#9 on the page 21 map) in Wedi Village. We met Purwanto, 30, chief of the Parisada for the Gunung Kidul Regency and a teacher of Hinduism. Purwanto said there are 6,000 Hindus in the regency, with 300 in Bento itself. The temple was built with local funding starting in 1975, put into use in 1983 and finally completed in 2001. The district has six puras.

### Wonosobo Village

Today, April 25, is our last day in Java. We proceeded early in the morning 150 km to Wonosobo (#10 on the page 21 map) in the Wonosobo Regency; the name comes from the Sanskrit *vanasabha*, "forest gathering place." There we met Rishi Dwijati Praviro Dharma Telaba, senior priest of the Pura Giri Mulyo. He and other Hindu leaders welcomed us at Pura Giri Mulyo, built in 2000. There are about 60 Hindu and 100 Muslim families in the village and some 600 Hindus in the entire regency, which has a population of some 700,000.

Telaba, age 68, said the temple had been built collectively by everyone in the village, Hindus and Muslims alike using materials brought from Bali under the Parisada. Telaba converted from Islam and was trained as a priest in Bali.

He explained, "There is a ritual called *shuddhi vidhani* by which one may convert to Hinduism. It was in 2000 that I realized

my ancestors were Hindus and decided to come back. Later I became a priest. Now my whole family is Hindu. Previously, like many others, we were Muslims on our identity card, but never followed the Muslim way of praying."

### Gentle Souls

During my entire Java trip, though I could not directly understand a single word of what was said in Javanese and heard everything second-hand through Pak Dewa's translation, still I connected with the Javanese Hindus through our shared traditions, customs and heritage.

Pak Dewa studied and lived with the Javanese Hindus. He said their nature is termed *ewuh pakewuh*, "non-self assertive." It means keeping quiet and suffering without any argument or debate. He asserts that this is their shortcoming; they should openly express their feelings. If they had done so, the Balinese Hindus would not have imposed their style of Hinduism on them.

As I fly back to New Delhi, sweet memories of my hosts fill my thoughts. I find the *ewuh pakewuh* quality a charming feature of the Javanese Hindu persona, being humble yet holding firm to what they want to do and think. They follow the path of equanimity in all circumstances, which is why at least some have persisted for hundreds of years since the last Hindu kingdom of Java fell. There is much we can learn from them.

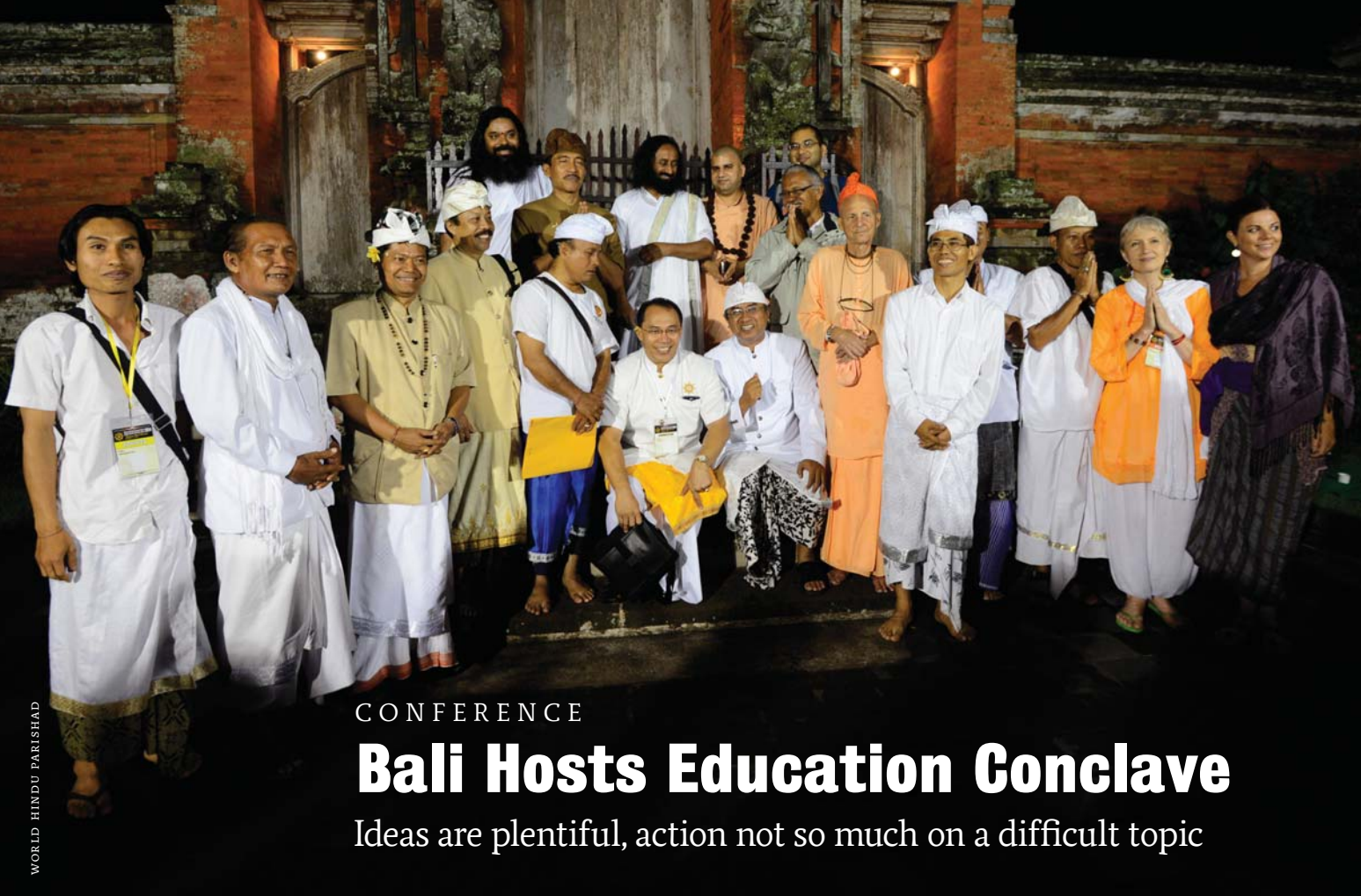
## Scenes in Bongso Wetan Village



(left to right) The open-air pura in Bongoso Wetan Village; Dharma Telaba, 68, a former Muslim who converted to Hinduism and is the chief of the Indonesian Parisada Hindu Dharma in Sandyasan Village, Wonosobo Regency; youth play the gamelan at the temple; a village graveyard for Hindus labeled "Hindu Cemetery"







CONFERENCE

## Bali Hosts Education Conclave

Ideas are plentiful, action not so much on a difficult topic

**H**INDU SAINTS AND LEADERS ASSEMBLED in Bali, Indonesia, in April to attend the World Hindu Wisdom Meet 2014 organized by the World Hindu Parishad and the World Hindu Centre. The theme was "Hinduism Based Education" with the slogan, *Sa vidya ya vimuktaye*—"knowledge is that which liberates." In addition to the presentations, Balinese Hindu artists and youth performed colorful, enlightening and entertaining cultural programs based on the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.

Speakers included Sri Sri Ravi Shankar of the Art of Living Foundation, Swami Paramatmananda, a disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati and head of the Arsha Vidya mandir in Rajkot, India, Swami Vigyanananda of the VHP, Dr. Achyuta Samanta, former rector of the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, and Dr. Chinmay Pandya, vice chancellor of the University of Dev Sanskriti in Haridwar. Prabhu Darmayasa and I Made Bakta were two of the main local organizers.

The assembled Hindu leaders and saints concurred that the challenge is not only to improve the human resource aspects of Hindus in mastering technology so that they can compete globally, but also to create a Hindu-based education capable of producing a holistic, intelligent and virtuous person. One speaker observed that the present education

system focuses on producing smart people but totally neglects character building.

The Indian saints and intellectuals emphasized infusing modern education with the ancient, traditional gurukul and Vedic system in which living with the gurus and spiritual masters is important. The feasibility of this idea was not immediately made apparent. The Indonesian speakers, especially, Putu Sudira, highlighted the Balinese concept of *tri hita karana*, "three causes of well being:" harmony between the people, harmony with nature and harmony with God.

While many other ideas were discussed, most of them futuristic and some unrelated to education, the main focus was on producing guidelines for Hindu-based education and facilitating cooperation between Hindu educational institutions worldwide. The creation of a Hindu university was mooted, as well as providing scholarships to students wanting to pursue higher education in any field related to Hinduism. One speaker proposed short education modules to effectively empower young Hindus to face from a position of strength attempts to convert them to other faiths.

In his speech, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar claimed, "The task is to implement the ancient wisdom in our modern times. You know of Rishi Markandeya, who came here from India. But in India, our children are not

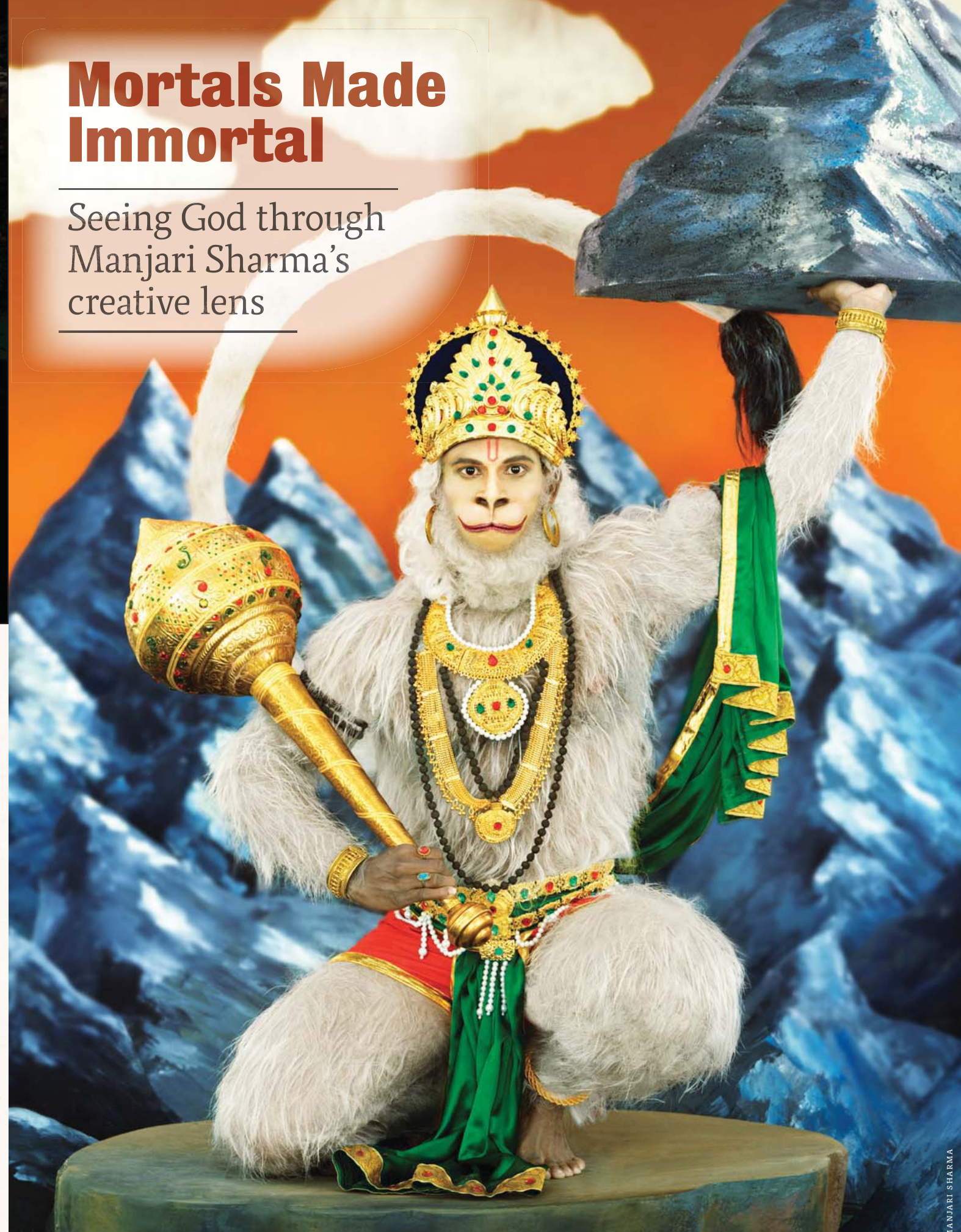
taught about our rishis, or taught that it is all just fantasy. For them history begins with the Middle Ages. The result is the youth don't take pride in their own heritage, and when pride is destroyed, culture is destroyed. A Hindu education should bring an all-accommodating, broad outlook toward life. Hindu wisdom can nip extremism in the bud. The *Vedas* say, 'Let knowledge come from all sides.' That means we honor wisdom wherever it comes from, and if we honor wisdom, there cannot be extremism, fanaticism or terrorism." His organization offered to share their experience in the training of youth.

Swami Paramatmananda told the group, "Today's education system has its main focus on money and more worldly pleasures—artha and kama. In the past, not just the wisdom of earning was taught, but how to conduct yourself; and that is missing today."

Professor I Made Bakta, general secretary of the World Hindu Parishad, told HINDUISM TODAY that the conference did not meet its goals because some of the main speakers could not come, but promised to pursue the matter in future conferences. He said, "We need to have a balance between modern science education and the teaching of Hindu dharma. Our system in Bali, which is administered from Jakarta, is just two hours a week, and the content is not so good. We want to improve this."

# Mortals Made Immortal

Seeing God through Manjari Sharma's creative lens







BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

**A** MAJESTIC HANUMAN HOLDS UP A mountain, Ma Saraswati sits resplendent on her tiger; Lord Shiva stands atop a vanquished demon; there is Ma Kali, fierce and blood-thirsty, garlanded with the skulls of evil-doers; and Ganesha, calm and peaceful with a bowl of ladoos in His hand.

These are familiar images of Gods and Goddesses that Hindus have worshiped since childhood and seen in sacred texts, in temples, in homes, in bazaars and in calendar art. Imagine these gigantic paintings, larger than life, in an art gallery, surrounded by votive candles, making the ambiance almost that of a temple and making these images accessible to all, believers and nonbelievers.

Now what if I was to tell you that these are not paintings at all but life-size photographs of living human beings dressed up as Gods and Goddesses? That the ferocious Ma Kali is an artist in real life, Hanuman is a body builder who works in a gym, Ma Saraswati is a television anchor and Lord Brahma is an architect? That Ma Lakshmi went on to compete in the semifinals of Miss India 2014, winning the titles Miss Beautiful Smile and Miss Beautiful Hair?

Does that take away from the sacred context or enhance it? After all, Hinduism has long proclaimed the Divine within each person and explained that the human soul is but

a part of the Supreme Being, or Paramatma. Does that belief shine through this art and show man's Godliness or God's humanity?

We turned to the artist, Manjari Sharma, for the intriguing back-story on this unusual art, collectively titled *Darshan*. Sharma, who received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Columbus College of Art & Design, Columbus, Ohio, and studied at S.V.T. College in Mumbai, has been immersed in the art world in the West.

She explained that to create this series, she conducted exhaustive research on each Divinity, which led to the gathering of a team of 35 Indian craftsmen who created props, sets, prosthetics, make-up, costumes and jewelry to her exact specifications. The final photographs are not the result of digital manipulation. They are images shot in a recreated world, almost like a film shoot. When Sharma finally looks through the lens and clicks the photograph, you get not the ordinary person—gym trainer or architect—but the transformation, the human soul as Divine Being.

Through her elaborate art, you could say Manjari Sharma is imitating the grand play, or *leela*, of the Lord, giving the role of the Almighty to the most unlikely persons. She is a long way from the temples of her youth but is creating a temple for the uninitiated through her art. She had *Darshan*, a solo exhibition, in 2013 at ClampArt Gallery in New York and then at Richard Levy Gallery in New Mexico this year. Her work is currently on view in

*Transcendent Deities of India: The Everyday Occurrence of the Divine* (May 2–September 14) at Asia Society in Houston, along with the work of the noted artist Raja Ravi Varma and upcoming digital artist Abhishek Singh.

Bridget Bray, director of exhibitions at the Asia Society Texas Center, tells us, "These modern and contemporary representations of the Deities preserve the tangible connection between worshipers and the objects of their reverence, which has an important religious function as well as making the works visually compelling to a broader audience."

Sharma's work has enjoyed great acclaim: it received the 2014 Curator's Choice Award at the Center, Santa Fe, and was selected for New York Times Portfolio Review. Both the art and Hindu worlds are recognizing the strength of these works: Sharma recently received the "Dharmic Arts Award" by the Hindu American Foundation in Washington DC.

"I awarded top honors to Manjari Sharma's *Darshan* project, which stood out in its appearance, inspiration, intent and technique," notes Malcolm Daniel, Curator of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. "To me, these images hover between the traditional art they reference and something wholly inventive, between constructed fiction and straight photography, and between sincere spiritual expression and kitsch. *Darshan* is an ambitious and complex undertaking and was unique among the several hundred submissions reviewed." The



museum recently acquired the Ma Saraswati photograph.

### The Gods of Mumbai

So where did this story start? Sharma recalls her childhood days in Mumbai, where pilgrimage to various temples was an important part of her growing up days: "My mother was a spiritually curious soul and still is. There was always spiritual material floating around the house," she recalls. "My dad always said Hinduism is a philosophy of life. And my mom always said it was about learning to let go and trust the universe. I always had positive associations of Hinduism as a practice because it was never a compulsion. Even at a temple, you could walk around at your pace and go explore different parts of it. My parents encouraged questions, lots of them, and still do."

Although Sharma spent her growing-up years in Mumbai, she has spent the last decade in the West. She says, "That has resulted in some incredible cultural and reverse-cultural experiences. Project *Darshan*, in particular, had me return to India four times within

the past year and a half. I feel the work, the process, is important to me. I feel that's what Sri Krishna told Arjuna and it's what rings true for me. The process, the philosophy, the goal, is the journey and not the destination."

Sharma's work seems to incorporate so many different disciplines. For her, photography is a license to form or find visual and conceptual relationships between related and unrelated objects, people and places: "It is a discipline that at first makes me lose myself in practice but in the end find myself in its result. My artwork is rooted in the study of relationships, personal mythology and experience. I moved from India ten years ago, and the stories I like to tell seem to address, in one way or another, the disparity between these two cultures."

For Sharma, this project has been almost a devotion, a tapasya/austerity, creating these works from scratch, from transforming contemporary TV anchors and models into iconic depictions of a Higher Authority. What was she hoping to convey through these large-scale portraits of God?

"I am inviting the viewer to consider the

**Gods as real people:** (previous page) The final photograph of Lord Hanuman; (opposite) Asia Society Texas Center guests discuss the photograph of a live male Mumbai model transformed into Lord Nataraja; (above) making up Lord Hanuman; (below) setting up for shoots in Mumbai.

photograph instead of the painting or the sculpture as a means of spiritual engagement. I am also inviting the viewer to think about the idea of a darshan and honor the power of life-altering moments."

As she explains, usually a darshan in Hindu temple happens at dawn and dusk and consists of a prayer ceremony accompanied by burning lamps, echoing sounds of conch shells and wafting scents of flowers and incense. A connection with that image of a Deity in the form of sculpture or painting is what a devotee comes in to experience. This experience of seeking and receiving, seeing God and being seen, is called a *darshan*. She adds, "To me, a darshan is a moment in which you are altered forever. A true darshan will re-



Making arms



Dressing Siva Nataraja



Ma Lakshmi makeup



Fitting Ganesha's head



Building Lakshmi's set

PHOTOS: VARUN SATHE, DILNAAZ MEHTA, ASHISH GURBANI



main with you and burn a hole in your memory. To me, life is really about going from one memorable darshan to another."

To create the technical magic of this darshan, however, was no easy task. All the images were created in India. The plan was followed by the assembly of a crew equipped to handle the production. The first image was Ma Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and fortune. Recalls Sharma, "At the time I had just under 20 craftsmen; that included jewelry designers, fashion stylists, make up and prop artists. This team eventually grew to 35 people. The production was highly involved and meticulous. It usually takes about four weeks for a piece to come together, and about a dozen pieces of film are shot. The final one that wins is always based on the expression on the character's face."

The hardest part was dealing with mortals, and people management was the mantra of the day. Says Sharma, "It was about tempering my expectation of perfection on set, and communicating to people who are used to being on a film set, that the final image will be a six-foot-tall fine art print that people will be able to inspect closely. Most craftsmen in India are used to working on what they called "mythos" which are television soaps based on Hindu scripture. It's different when you see Ganesha for a second and then cut to a dialogue from Shiva as opposed to staring at a perfectly still high-resolution print on the wall."

Since everyone—from the models to the workers—had to be paid, there was a financial element to the project. Sharma funded it by an innovative and successful Kickstarter campaign and also sold prints of the artwork



**Ma Lakshmi:** One of the Miss India 2014 pageant winners transformed into a living Goddess

who appreciates the personal story that has inspired the content. There have certainly been a few art patrons from the East who have supported this project and appreciated it right from the get go."

Indeed, viewers get to taste the other aspects of a darshan since Sharma incorporates incense lamps, sounds from her favorite temples in Mumbai and also invocations in her mother's voice of well-loved Sanskrit chants, all adding layers of memory and experience to the project.

Asked who her favorite Deity is, Sharma points to Ma Saraswati, the Goddess of Art, Music and Education, who was the last in the series. "I had a strong connection with Her and the journey was really rewarded on so many levels. When the project came to an end, I felt such a sense of belonging with Her. I may have

started with Ma Lakshmi so I could have Her blessings to proceed in the project, but the goal of life is to really understand the incredible value art, music and education bring to your life. I ended my project with Ma Saraswati, a figurehead for things that have become most important to me."

The greatest reward of this adventure with the Gods? Manjari Sharma confides, "It was finally being able to stand in between these six-foot images and feel what I had planned as a scribble I could now see and experience coming to life."

See: [manjarisharma.com](http://manjarisharma.com)

## The Camera as Medium of Worship

### MANJARI SHARMA'S TESTIMONY

Having left a ritual-driven community in India, my move to the US precipitated an enormous cultural shift. It was this cultural paralysis that motivated me to use my one medium of worship—the camera—to study, construct and deconstruct the mythologies of my land.

"The goal was to turn multidimensional memories of sculptures and ornamental paintings of Hindu Gods, into two-dimensional photographs. For centuries, the way that we have experienced darshans (metaphysical connection

established upon sight) is via laying gaze upon a molded figure, a carved statue or an illustration that represents a likeness to avatars described in Hindu scripture. This series of images invites the viewer to consider a photograph as means of spiritual engagement.

"By bridging the gap between the significant ceremonies of my parents' lives and my own mythology, this series has become my reason to immerse, question and push the boundaries of my faith, not only beyond my imagination, but beyond the very frame that surrounds the photograph."



### EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

# Humanity's Diverse Faiths

## A Presentation of Religious Beliefs, Goals, Paths Of Attainment & Ideological Comparisons

IF RELIGIONS HAVE EVER CONFUSED & CONFOUNDED YOU, take heart! This resource was written just for you. It is the humble attempt of the HINDUISM TODAY editorial team to gather from hundreds of sources a simple, in-a-nutshell summary of the world's major spiritual paths. The strength of this undertaking, brevity, is also its flaw. Complex and subtle distinctions, not to mention important

exceptions, are consciously set aside for the sake of simplicity. By juxtaposing their beliefs and goals, we hope to highlight how the various religions are similar to and different from Hinduism. An hour with these pages may dispel the myth that all religions are one, that they all seek to lead adherents by the same means to the same ultimate reality. That's a myth. They don't, as a conscientious review will show.







## HINDUISM

*Perishable is matter. Immortal, imperishable the Lord, who, the One, controls the perishable and also the soul. Meditating on Him, uniting with Him, becoming more and more like Him, one is freed at the last from the world's illusion.* SHVETASVATARA UPANISHAD 1.1

**Founded:** Hinduism, the world's oldest religion, has no beginning—it predates recorded history.

**Founder:** Hinduism has no human founder.

**Major Scriptures:** The *Vedas*, *Agamas* and more.

**Adherents:** Over one billion, mostly in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Malaysia, Mauritius, Indonesia, Indian Ocean, Africa, Europe and North and South America.

**Sects:** There are four main denominations: Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism.

### SYNOPSIS

Hinduism is a vast and profound religion. It worships one Supreme Reality (called by many names) and teaches that all souls ultimately realize Truth. There is no eternal hell, no damnation. It accepts all genuine spiritual paths—from pure monism (“God alone exists”) to theistic dualism (“When shall I know His Grace?”). Each soul is free to find his own way, whether by devotion, austerity, meditation (yoga) or selfless service. Stress is placed on temple worship, scripture and the guru-disciple tradition. Festivals, pilgrimage, chanting of holy hymns and home worship are dynamic practices. Love, nonviolence, good conduct and the law of dharma define the Hindu path. Hinduism explains that the soul reincarnates until all karmas are resolved and God Realization is attained. The magnificent holy temples, the peaceful piety of the Hindu home, the subtle metaphysics and the science of yoga all play their part. Hinduism is a mystical religion, leading the devotee to personally experience the Truth within, finally reaching the pinnacle of consciousness where man and God are one.

### GOALS OF THE FOUR MAJOR HINDU SECTS

**SAIVISM:** The primary goal of Saivism is realizing one's identity with God Siva, in perfect union and nondifferentiation. This is termed *nirvikalpa samadhi*, Self Realization, and may be attained in this life, granting *moksha*, permanent liberation from the cycles of birth and death. A secondary goal is *savikalpa samadhi*, the realization of Sat-chidananda, a unitive experience within superconsciousness in which perfect Truth, knowledge and bliss are known. The soul's final destiny is *vishvagrasya*, total merger in God Siva.

**SHAKTISM:** The primary goal of Shaktism is *moksha*, defined as complete identification with God Siva. A secondary goal for the Shaktas is to perform good works selflessly so that one may go, on death, to the heaven worlds and thereafter enjoy a good birth on Earth, for heaven, too, is a transitory state. For Shaktas, God is both the formless Absolute (Siva) and the manifest Divine (Shakti), worshiped as Parvati, Durga, Kali, Amman, Rajarajeshvari, etc. Emphasis is given to the feminine manifest by which the masculine Unmanifest is ultimately reached.

**VAISHNAVISM:** The primary goal of Vaishnavites is *videha mukti*, liberation—attainable only after death—when the small self realizes union with God Vishnu's body as a part of Him, yet maintains its pure individual personality. Lord Vishnu—all-pervasive consciousness—is the soul of the universe, distinct from the world and from the *jivas*, “embodied souls,” which constitute His body. His transcendent Being is a celestial form residing in the city of Vaikuntha, the home of all eternal values and perfection, where the soul joins Him upon mukti, liberation. A secondary goal—the experience of God's Grace—can



THOMAS KELLY: A KUMBHA MEHA PILGRIM HONORING THE SUN IN THE GANGES RIVER

be reached while yet embodied through taking refuge in Vishnu's unbounded love. By loving and serving Vishnu and meditating upon Him and His incarnations, our spiritual hunger grows and we experience His Grace flooding our whole being.

**SMARTISM:** The ultimate goal of Smartas is *moksha*, to realize oneself as Brahman—the Absolute and only Reality—and become free from *samsara*, the cycles of birth and death. For this, one must conquer the state of *avidya*, or ignorance, which causes the world to appear as real. All illusion has vanished for the realized being, *jivan-mukta*, even as he lives out life in the physical body. At death, his inner and outer bodies are extinguished. Brahman alone exists.

### PATHS OF ATTAINMENT

**SAIVISM:** The path for Saivites is divided into four progressive stages of belief and practice called *charya*, *kriya*, *yoga* and *jnana*. The soul evolves through karma and reincarnation from the instinctive-intellectual sphere into virtuous and moral living, then into temple worship and devotion, followed by internalized worship or yoga and its meditative disciplines. Union with God Siva comes through the grace of the satguru and culminates in the soul's maturity in the state of *jnana*, or wisdom. Saivism values both bhakti and yoga, devotional and contemplative *sadhanas*, spiritual practices.

**SHAKTISM:** The spiritual practices in Shaktism are similar to those in Saivism, though there is more emphasis in Shaktism on God's Power as opposed to Being, on mantras and yantras, and on embracing apparent opposites: male-female, absolute-relative, pleasure-pain,

cause-effect, mind-body. Certain sects within Shaktism undertake “left-hand” tantric rites, consciously using the world of form to transmute and eventually transcend that world. The “left-hand” approach is somewhat occult in nature; it is considered a path for the few, not the many. The “right-hand” path is more conservative in nature.

**VAISHNAVISM:** Most Vaishnavites believe that religion is the performance of bhakti *sadhanas*, and that man can communicate with and receive the grace of the Gods and Goddesses through the darshan of Their enshrined *murthis*. The paths of karma yoga and *jnana* yoga lead to bhakti yoga. Among the foremost practices of Vaishnavites is chanting the holy names of the Avatars, Vishnu's incarnations, especially Rama and Krishna. Through total self-surrender, *prapatti*, to Vishnu, to Krishna or to His beloved consort Radharani, liberation from *samsara* is attained.

**SMARTISM:** Smartas, the most eclectic of Hindus, believe that *moksha* is achieved through *jnana* yoga alone—defined as an intellectual and meditative but non-kundalini-yoga path. *Jnana* yoga's progressive stages are scriptural study (*shravana*), reflection (*manana*) and sustained meditation (*dhyana*). Guided by a realized guru and avowed to the unreality of the world, the initiate meditates on himself as Brahman to break through the illusion of maya. Devotees may also choose from three other non-successive paths to cultivate devotion, accrue good karma and purify the mind. These are bhakti yoga, karma yoga and raja yoga, which certain Smartas teach can also bring enlightenment.





## BUDDHISM

*Let go the past, let go the future, and let go what is in between, transcending the things of time. With your mind free in every direction, you will not return to birth and aging.* DHAMMAPADA 348

**Founded:** Buddhism began about 2,500 years ago in India.

**Founder:** Gautama Siddhartha, the Buddha, or "Enlightened One."

**Major Scriptures:** The *Tripitaka*, *Anguttara-Nikaya*, *Dhammapadam*, *Sutta-Nipata*, *Samyutta-Nikaya* and many others.

**Adherents:** Over 400 million.

**Sects:** Buddhism today is divided into three main sects: Theravada or Hinayana (Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia), Mahayana (China, Japan, Vietnam, Korea), and Vajrayana (Tibet, Mongolia and Japan).

### SYNOPSIS

Life's goal is *nirvana*. Toward that end, Buddha's teachings are encapsulated in the Four Noble Truths, *chatvari aya satyani*:

**1. The Truth of Suffering (duhkha):** Suffering is the central fact of life. Being born is pain, growing old is pain, sickness is pain, death is pain. Union with what we dislike is pain, separation from what we like is pain, not obtaining what we desire is pain.

**2. The Truth of the Origin (Samudaya) of Suffering:** The cause of suffering is the desire (*iccha*), craving (*tanha*) or thirst (*trishna*) for sensual pleasures, for existence and experience, for worldly possessions and power. This craving binds one to the wheel of rebirth, *samsara*.

**3. The Truth of the Cessation (Nirodha) of Suffering:** Suffering can be brought to an end only by the complete cessation of desires—the forsaking, relinquishing and detaching of oneself from desire and craving.

**4. The Truth of the Path (Marga) to Ending Suffering:** The means to the end of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path (*arya ashtanga marga*), right belief, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation.

### THE GOALS OF BUDDHISM

The primary goal of the Buddhists is *nirvana*, defined as the end of change, literally meaning "blowing out," as one blows out a candle. Theravada tradition describes the indescribable as "peace and tranquility." The Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions view it as "neither existence nor nonexistence," "emptiness and the unchanging essence of the Buddha" and "ultimate Reality." It is synonymous with release from the bonds of desire, ego, suffering and rebirth. Buddha never defined *nirvana*, except to say, "There is an unborn, an unoriginated, an unmade, an uncompounded," and it lies beyond the experiences of the senses. Nirvana is not a state of annihilation, but of peace and reality. As with Jainism, Buddhism has no creator God and thus no union with Him.

### PATH OF ATTAINMENT

Buddhism takes followers through progressive stages of *dhyana*, *samapatti* and *samadhi*. *Dhyana* is meditation, which leads to moral and intellectual purification, and to detachment which leads to pure consciousness. The *samapattis*, or further *dhyanas*, lead through a progressive nullification of psychic, mental and emotional activity to a state which is perfect solitude, neither perception nor nonperception. This leads further to *samadhi*, supernatural consciousness, and, finally, entrance into the ineffable *nirvana*. Many Buddhists understand the ultimate destiny and goal to be a heaven of bliss where one can enjoy eternity with the Bodhisattvas. Mahayana places less value on monasticism than Theravada and differs further in believing one can rely on the active help of other realized beings for salvation. Vajrayana, also called Tantric or Mantrayana Buddhism, stresses tantric rituals and yoga practices under the guidance of a guru. Its recognition of and involvement in the supernatural distinguishes it from other Buddhist schools.



## JAINISM

*Above, below and in front, people indulge in violent activities against living beings individually and collectively in many ways. Discerning this, a wise man neither himself inflicts violence on these bodies, nor induces others to do so, nor approves of their doing so.* MAHAVIRA (ACHARANGA SUTRA)

**Founded:** The origins of Jainism are obscure, extending back before recorded history.

**Founder:** Rishabha, also known as Adinatha.

**Major Scriptures:** The *Jain Agamas* and *Siddhantas*, based on the teachings of Vardhamana Mahavira (ca 500 bce), among Jainism's most influential teachers and the 24th and last in the lineage of *tirthankaras*.

**Adherents:** About five million, almost exclusively in Central and South India, especially around Mumbai.

**Sects:** There are two sects. The Digambara ("Sky-clad") sect holds that a saint should own nothing, not even clothes, thus their practice of wearing only a loincloth. They believe that salvation in this birth is not possible for women. The Svetambara ("White-robed") sect differs on these points.

### SYNOPSIS

Jainism strives for the realization of the highest perfection of man, which in its original purity is free from all pain and the bondage of birth and death. The term *Jain* is derived from the Sanskrit *jina*, "conqueror," and implies conquest over this bondage imposed by the phenomenal world. Jainism does not consider it necessary to recognize a God or any being higher than the perfect man. Souls are beginningless and endless, eternally individual. It classes souls into three broad categories: those that are not yet evolved; those in the process of evolution and those that are liberated, free from rebirth. Jainism has strong monastic-ascetic leanings, even for householders. Its supreme ideal is ahimsa, equal kindness and reverence for all life. The *Jain Agamas* teach great reverence for all forms of life, strict codes of vegetarianism, asceticism, nonviolence even in self-defense, and opposition to

war. Jainism is, above all, a religion of love and compassion.

### THE GOALS OF JAINISM

The primary goal of Jains is becoming a Paramatman, a perfected soul. This is accomplished when all layers of karma, which is viewed as a substance, are removed, leading the soul to rise to the ceiling of the universe, from darkness to light, where, beyond the Gods and all currents of transmigration, the soul abides forever in the solitary bliss of *moksha*. *Moksha* is defined in Jainism as liberation, self-unity and integration, pure aloneness and endless calm, freedom from action and desire, freedom from karma and rebirth. *Moksha* is attainable in this world or at the time of death. When it is reached, man has fulfilled his destiny as the man-God. For Jains there is no creator God and, therefore, no communion with Him. The nature of the soul is pure consciousness, power, bliss and omniscience.

### PATH OF ATTAINMENT

The soul passes through various stages of spiritual development, called *gunasthanas*, progressive manifestations of the innate faculties of knowledge and power accompanied by decreasing sinfulness and increasing purity. Souls attain better births according to the amount of personal karma they are able to eliminate during life. Between births, souls dwell in one of the seven hells, the sixteen heavens or fourteen celestial regions. Liberated souls abide at the top of the universe. All Jains take five vows, but it is the monk who practices celibacy and poverty. Jainism places great stress on ahimsa, asceticism, yoga and monasticism as the means of attainment. Temple pujas are performed to the twenty-four Tirthankaras or spiritual preceptors, literally "ford-makers," those who take others across the ocean of *samsara*.





## SIKHISM

*Pilgrimages, austere discipline, compassion and charity—these by themselves bring only an iota of merit. Listening and believing with love and humility in your mind, cleanse yourself with the Name at the sacred shrine deep within. GURU NANAK*

**Founded:** Sikhism began about 500 years ago in the Lahore area of India's Punjab region, which is now in Pakistan.

**Founder:** Guru Nanak.

**Major Scriptures:** The *Adi Granth*, revered as the present guru of the faith.

**Adherents:** Estimated at 26 million, mostly in India's state of Punjab.

**Sects:** Besides the Khalsa, there are the Ram Raiyas in Uttar Pradesh and two groups that have living gurus—Mandharis and Nirankaris.

### SYNOPSIS

The Muslims began their invasions of India some 1,200 years ago. As a result of Islam's struggle with Hindu religion and culture, leaders sought a reconciliation between the two faiths, a middle path that embraced both. Sikhism (from *sikka*, meaning "disciple") united Hindu bhakti and Sufi mysticism most successfully. Sikhism began as a peaceful religion and patiently bore much persecution from the Muslims, but with the tenth guru, Govind Singh, self-preservation forced a strong militarism aimed at protecting the faith and way of life against severe opposition. Sikhism stresses the importance of devotion, intense faith in the guru, the repetition of God's name (*nam*) as a means of salvation, opposition to the worship of idols, the brotherhood of all men and rejection of caste differences (though certain caste attitudes persist today). There have been no gurus in the main Sikh tradition since Guru Govind Singh, whose last instructions to followers were to honor and cherish the teachings of the ten gurus as embodied in the scripture *Adi Granth*.

### THE GOALS OF SIKHISM

The goal of Sikhism lies in *moksha*, which is release and union with God, described as that of a lover with the beloved and resulting in self-transcendence, egolessness and enduring bliss, or *ananda*. The Sikh is immersed in God, assimilated, identified with Him. It is the fulfillment of individuality in which man, freed of all limitations, becomes co-extensive and co-operant and co-present with God. In Sikhism, *moksha* means release into God's love. Man is not God, but is fulfilled in unitary, mystical consciousness with Him. God is the Personal Lord and Creator.

### PATH OF ATTAINMENT

To lead man to the goal of *moksha*, Sikhism follows a path of japa and hymns. Through chanting of the Holy Names, Sat Nam, the soul is cleansed of its impurity, the ego is conquered and the wandering mind is stilled. This leads to a superconscious stillness. From here one enters into the divine light and thus attains the state of divine bliss. Once this highest goal is attained, the devotee must devote his awareness to the good of others. The highest goal can be realized only by God's grace, and this is obtained exclusively by following the *satguru* (or nowadays a sant, or saint, since there are no living gurus, by the edict of Govind Singh, the tenth and last guru) and by repeating the holy names of the Lord guided by the *Adi Granth*, the scripture and sole repository of spiritual authority. For Sikhs there is no image worship, no symbol of Divinity.



SHUTTERSTOCK: THE GRAND TAOIST TEMPLE IN SINGAPORE

## TAOISM

*Close your mouth, block off your senses, blunt your sharpness, untie your knots, soften your glare, settle your dust. This is the primal identity. LAO TZU, TAO TE CHING*

**Founded:** Taoism began about 2,500 years ago in China.

**Founder:** Lao-tzu, whom Confucius described as a dragon riding the wind and clouds.

**Major Scriptures:** The *Tao te Ching*, or "Book of Reason and Virtue," is among the shortest of all scriptures, containing only 5,000 words. Also central are the sacred writings of Chuang-tsu.

**Adherents:** Estimated at 50 million, mostly in China and other parts of Asia.

**Sects:** Taoism is a potently mystical tradition, so interpretations have been diverse and its sects are many.

### SYNOPSIS

The Tao, or Way, has never been put down in words; rather it is left for the seeker to discover within. Lao-tzu himself wrote, "The Tao that can be named is not the eternal Tao." Taoism is concerned with man's spiritual level of being, and in the *Tao te Ching* the awakened man is compared to bamboo: upright, simple and useful outside—and hollow inside. Effulgent emptiness is the spirit of Tao, but no words will capture its spontaneity, its eternal newness. Adherents of the faith are taught to see the Tao everywhere, in all beings and in all things. Taoist shrines are the homes of divine beings who guide the religion, bless and protect worshippers. A uniquely Taoist concept is *wu-wei*, nonaction. This does not mean no action, but rather not exceeding spontaneous action that accords with needs as they naturally arise; not indulging in calculated action and not acting so as to exceed the very minimum required for effective results. If we keep still and listen to the inner promptings of the Tao, we shall act effortlessly, efficiently,

hardly giving the matter a thought. We will be ourselves, as we are.

### THE GOALS OF TAOISM

The primary goal of Taoism may be described as the mystical intuition of the Tao, which is the Way, the Primal Meaning, the Undivided Unity, the Ultimate Reality. Both immanent and transcendent, the Tao is the natural way of all beings, it is the nameless beginning of Heaven and Earth, and it is the mother of all things. All things depend upon the Tao, all things return to it. Yet it lies hidden, transmitting its power and perfection to all things. He who has realized the Tao has uncovered the layers of consciousness so that he arrives at pure consciousness and sees the inner truth of everything. Only one who is free of desire can apprehend the Tao, thereafter leading a life of actionless activity. There is no Personal God in Taoism, and thus no union with Him. There are three worlds and beings within them, and worship is part of the path.

### PATH OF ATTAINMENT

One who follows the Tao follows the natural order of things, not seeking to improve upon nature or to legislate virtue to others. The Taoist observes *wu-wei*, or nondoing, like water, which without effort seeks and finds its proper level. This path includes purifying oneself through stilling the appetites and the emotions, accomplished in part through meditation, breath and other forms of inner discipline, generally under a master. The foremost practice is goodness or naturalness, and detachment from the Ten Thousand Things of the world.





## CONFUCIANISM

**Founded:** Confucianism began about 2500 years ago in China.

**Founder:** Supreme Sage K'ung-fu-tsu (Confucius) and Second Sage Meng-tzu (Mencius).

**Major Scriptures:** The *Analects*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, *Great Learning* and *Mencius*.

**Adherents:** Estimated at 350 million, mostly in China, Japan, Burma and Thailand.

**Sects:** There are no formal sects within Confucianism. Followers are free to profess other religions and yet still be Confucianists.

### SYNOPSIS

Confucianism is, and has been for over 25 centuries, the dominant philosophical system in China and the guiding light in almost every aspect of Chinese life. Confucius and his followers traveled throughout the many feudal states of the Chinese Empire, persuading rulers to adopt his social reforms. They did not offer a point-by-point program, but stressed instead the "Way," or "One Thread," Jen (also translated as "humanity or love"), that runs through all Confucius' teachings. They urged individuals to strive for perfect virtue, righteousness (called Yi) and improvement of character. They taught the importance of harmony in the family, order in the state and peace in the Empire, which they saw as inherently interdependent. Teachings emphasize a code of conduct, self-cultivation and propriety—and thus the attainment of social and national order. Stress is more on human duty and the ideal of the "superior man" than on a divine or supramundane Reality. Still, Confucius fasted, worshiped the ancestors, attended

*To be able under all circumstances to practice five things constitutes perfect virtue. These five things are gravity, generosity of soul, sincerity, earnestness and kindness.* CONFUCIUS

sacrifices and sought to live in harmony with Heaven. Confucianism is now enjoying a renaissance in China.

### THE GOALS OF CONFUCIANISM

The primary goal of Confucianism is to create a true nobility through proper education and the inculcation of all the virtues. It is described as the return to the way of one's ancestors, and the classics are studied to discover the ancient way of virtue. Spiritual nobility is attainable by all men; it is a moral achievement. Confucius accepted the Tao, but placed emphasis on this return to an idealized age and the cultivation of the superior man, on the pragmatic rather than the mystical. The superior man's greatest virtue is benevolent love. The other great virtues are duty, wisdom, truth and propriety. Salvation is seen as realizing and living one's natural goodness, which is endowed by heaven through education. The superior man always knows the right and follows his knowledge.

### PATH OF ATTAINMENT

Besides virtue, the five relationships offer the follower of Confucianism the means for progressing. These five relationships are to his ruler, his father, his wife, his elder brother and his friend. Ancestors are revered in Confucianism, and it is assumed that their spirit survives death. With respect to a Deity, Confucius was himself an agnostic, preferring to place emphasis on the ethical life here rather than to speak of a spiritual life beyond earthly existence, guiding men's minds not to the future, but to the present and the past.



## SHINTOISM

**Founded:** Shintoism began around 2500—3,000 years ago in Japan.

**Founder:** Each of the thirteen ancient sects has its own founder.

**Major Scriptures:** *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Things), *Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan), a later work, *Yengishiki* (Institutes of the period of Yengi), and the *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves* are the primary works, but they are not regarded as revealed scripture.

**Adherents:** Estimated at 30 million, mostly in Japan. Most are also Buddhists.

### SYNOPSIS

There are two main divisions. One is the thirteen ancient sects, all very similar. The second is known as State Shinto, and is a later synthesis finding its highest expression in the worship of the Emperor and loyalty to the State and family. Shinto (from the Chinese characters *Shen* and *Tao*, signifying the "Way of the Spirits") is called Kami-no-michi in vernacular Japanese. Kami are the innumerable Gods or nature spirits. Shinto shrines are many, over 100,000 in Japan. In the shrines no images are worshiped, rather it is considered that the Kami themselves are there. Fresh foods, water, incense, etc., are offered daily upon the altar. There is an inward belief in the sacredness of the whole of the universe, that man can be in tune with this sacredness. Stress is placed on truthfulness and purification through which man may remove the "dust" which conceals his inherently divine nature and

*I have no corporeal existence, but universal benevolence is my divine body. I have no physical power, but uprightness is my strength. I have no religious clairvoyance beyond what is bestowed by Wisdom, I have no power of miracle other than the attainment of quiet happiness, I have no tact except the exercise of gentleness.* TOSHOGU-GOIKUN, ORACLE OF THE DEITY OF SUMIYOSHI

thus receive the guidance and blessings of Kami. The Shintoist's ardent love of the motherland has found unique expression in the loyalty and devotion of the Japanese people to their state institutions.

### THE GOALS OF SHINTOISM

The primary goal of Shintoism is to achieve immortality among the ancestral beings, the Kami. Kami is understood by the Shintoist as a supernatural, holy power living in or connected to the world of the spirit. Shintoism is strongly animistic, as are most Eastern and Oriental faiths, believing that all living things possess a Kami nature. Man's nature is the highest, for he possesses the most Kami. Salvation is living in the spirit world with these divine beings, the Kami.

### PATH OF ATTAINMENT

Salvation is achieved in Shinto through observance of all taboos and the avoidance of persons and objects which might cause impurity or pollution. Prayers are made and offerings brought to the temples of the Gods and Goddesses, of which there are said to be 800 myriad in the universe. Man has no Supreme God to obey, but needs only know how to adjust to Kami in its various manifestations. A person's Kami nature survives death, and a man naturally desires to be worthy of being remembered with approbation by his descendants. Therefore, fulfillment of duty is a most important Shinto ideal.





## ZOROASTRIANISM

**Founded:** Zoroastrianism began 2,600 years ago in ancient Iran.  
**Founder:** Spenta Zarathustra (Zoroaster).  
**Major Scriptures:** Portions of the *Zend Avesta* (Persian).  
**Adherents:** 145,000, mostly near Mumbai, where they are called Parsis.  
**Sects:** The present-day sects are three: Shahenshai, Kadmi and Fassali.

### SYNOPSIS

Two principles form the basis of Zoroastrian ethics: the maintenance of life and the struggle against evil. In order to maintain life, one must till the soil, raise cattle, marry and have children. Asceticism and celibacy are condemned. Purity and avoidance of defilement (from death, demons, etc.) are valued. In order to combat evil, one must at all times oppose the forces of evil and those who side with them. Zoroastrianism stresses monotheism while recognizing the universal sway of two opposite forces (dualism). The powers of good are led by Ahura Mazda or Ormazd (the Wise Lord), and the forces of evil by Angra Mainyu or Ahriman (the Evil Spirit). Each side has an array of warriors—bands of angels and archangels on one side and hosts of demons and archfiends on the other. Good will eventually triumph on Judgment Day, when a Messiah and Savior named Saoshyant will appear to punish the wicked and establish the righteous in a paradise on Earth. A central feature of the faith is the sacred fire that is constantly kept burning in every home. Fire is considered the only

*Now the two primal Spirits, who reveal themselves in vision as Twins, are the Better and the Bad, in thought and word and action. Between these two the wise ones chose aright; the foolish not so.* ZEND AVESTA

worshipful symbol, the great purifier and sustainer, of the nature of the Sun itself.

### THE GOALS OF ZOROASTRIANISM

The goal of Zoroastrianism is to be rewarded with a place in heaven where the soul will be with God, called Ahura Mazda, sharing His blessed existence forever.

### PATH OF ATTAINMENT

Man's life, according to Zoroastrianism, is a moral struggle, not a search for knowledge or enlightenment. He is put on the Earth to affirm and approve the world, not to deny it, not to escape from it. Salvation is found in obedience to the will of Ahura Mazda as revealed and taught by His prophet Zoroaster. Man has but one life. He also has the freedom to choose between good and evil, the latter being embodied in Angra Mainyu, who rebelled against God. At death, each is judged and consigned to his deserved abode.

Zoroastrians hold truth as the greatest virtue, followed by good thoughts, words and deeds. They value the ethical life most highly. Though there will be a resurrection of the dead, a judgment and a kingdom of heaven on Earth, followed by punishment of the wicked, all sins will be eventually burned away and all of mankind will abide forever with Ahura Mazda. Hell, for the Zoroastrian, is not eternal.



## JUDAISM

*Man has three friends on whose company he relies. First, wealth, which goes with him only while good fortune lasts. Second, his relatives; they go only as far as the grave and leave him there. The third friend, his good deeds, go with him beyond the grave.* THE TALMUD

**Founded:** Judaism began about 3,700 years ago in the Near East (chiefly Canaan, now Israel; and Egypt).

**Founder:** Abraham, who started the lineage, and Moses, who emancipated the enslaved Jewish tribes from Egypt.

**Major Scriptures:** The *Torah* (the *Old Testament* and the *Talmud*).

**Adherents:** About 14 million worldwide, over half in the United States.

**Sects:** Jews are divided into Orthodox, Conservative and Reform sects, with other regional and ethnic divisions.

### SYNOPSIS

The religion of the Jews is inseparable from their history as a people. Much of the *Torah* traces the ancestry of Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and finally to Moses, the foremost of God's prophets in Hebrew history. It was Moses who conveyed to Judaism the Ten Commandments given by God and established the religious laws and traditions.

The *Torah* (literally, "Doctrine," "Teaching," "Law") consists primarily of the written *Torah*, i.e. the Hebrew *Bible*, or the *Old Testament*; and secondarily of oral *Torah*, ultimately codified as *Talmud* (literally "instruction"), in two redactions, Jerusalem *Talmud* and the more authoritative Babylonian *Talmud*. In the narrower sense, *Torah* denotes only the *Pentateuch*, i.e., the first five books of the *Old Testament*. But in extended usage, *Torah* as scripture is somewhat analogous to the Hindu *Veda*, which beyond the four *Samhitas* may also apply to their extensions, the *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. As a term for moral and religious principles, Jewish *Torah* has as comprehensive an application as *Hindu Dharma*.

By far the most profound characteristic of Judaism is its strict monotheism. The Jews hold an unshakable belief in one God and one God only, known as Yahweh, "whose name cannot be taken in vain," and from whom all creation flows. Jews consider themselves a chosen people, apart from all the other peoples of the Earth, by virtue of their covenant with Yahweh.

Much stress is placed on the hallowing of daily existence, worship in the synagogue, prayer and reading of the scriptures. Few religions can boast of such a close-knit family tradition as Judaism, making the home a great strength to the religion and a constant refuge to the faithful. Each day, morning and evening, every devout Jew affirms his faith by repeating Moses' prayer: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."

### THE GOALS OF JUDAISM

The goal of Judaism lies in the strict obedience to the *Torah*, Jewish scripture, which can alleviate the plight of the individual and of society. Obeying God's law brings rewards in the future life when the Messiah will come to overthrow evil and reward the righteous in God's kingdom on the Earth, the Day of the Lord. The soul thereafter will enjoy God's presence and love.

### PATH OF ATTAINMENT

Man has two impulses: good and evil. He can either follow God's law or rebel and be influenced by Satan, who caused God's creation to go astray. Following God's law is the highest morality, possible through obedience to the *Torah*, which pleases God. One must follow justice, charity, ethics and honesty, being true to the one true God, Yahweh.





## CHRISTIANITY

**Founded:** Christianity began about 2,000 years ago in what is now Israel.

**Founder:** Jesus of Nazareth, or Jesus Christ, "Anointed One," "the Messiah."

**Major Scriptures:** The *Bible*—Old and New Testaments.

**Adherents:** Estimated at 2 billion.

**Sects:** Christianity is divided into three main sects: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant. Among Protestants there are over 20,000 denominations.

### SYNOPSIS

The majority of Christians adhere to the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended unto Heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost,...the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." Most Christian faith revolves around the basic principles of this creed, but with important exceptions to its various beliefs. Christianity has an unswerving conviction that it is the only true religion, the only path to salvation. This engenders a missionary zeal, an urgency to evangelize around the world.

Stress is placed on acceptance of Jesus as God incarnate and Savior,

on good conduct, compassion, service to mankind, faith and preparation for the Final Judgment. Only good Christians will be saved and accepted into heaven. Membership is diminishing in developed nations but increasing in developing nations.

### THE GOALS OF CHRISTIANITY

The goal of Christianity is eternal life with God in heaven, a perfect existence in which God's glory and bliss are shared. It is also a personal life, enjoyed differently by souls according to the amount of grace achieved in life.

### PATH OF ATTAINMENT

Man's plight is caused by disobedience to God's will. Man needs redemption from the forces which would enslave and destroy him—fear, selfishness, hopelessness, desire and the supernatural forces of the Devil, sin and death, against which he is powerless. His salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ, that is, in acceptance of Jesus' resurrection from the dead as proof of God's power over the forces of sin and death. The good Christian lives a life of virtue and obedience to God out of gratitude to God for sacrificing Jesus for the sins of all who come to accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord. Jesus is to return again to judge the world and bring God's rule to the Earth. Through following the law of God as found in the *Holy Bible* and through God's grace, man attains salvation. Those who do not achieve this blessedness are, after death, consigned to a hell of eternal suffering and damnation.

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* HOLY BIBLE, JOHN 3:16 (KING JAMES VERSION)



SHUTTERSTOCK: PILGRIMS CIRCUMAMBULATE THE KAABA IN MECCA, SAUDI ARABIA

## ISLAM

**Founded:** Islam began about 1,400 years ago in present-day Saudi Arabia.

**Founder:** Prophet Mohammed.

**Major Scriptures:** The *Koran*, Islam's revealed scripture, and the *Hadith*, the teachings, sayings and life of the Prophet Mohammed.

**Adherents:** Over one billion, mostly in the Middle East, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa, China and Eastern Europe.

**Sects:** There are two main divisions within Islam. The Sunnis are followers of the political successors of Mohammed. The Shiites are followers of Mohammed's family successors, all martyred at an early age.

### SYNOPSIS

*Islam* means "submission," surrender to the will of God, called Allah. Those who submit are called Muslims. Islam is based upon five "pillars," or principal acts of faith to which every Muslim in the world adheres. These are: 1) Faith in Allah: "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet." 2) Praying five times daily: kneeling in the direction of Mecca, the holy city. 3) Giving of alms: a share of each Muslim's income is given to support the mosque and the poor. 4) Fasting: throughout Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, the faithful fast from sunrise to sunset. 5) Pilgrimage: the binding force of the peoples who have embraced Islam. At least once in life every believer who is physically and materially able to do so must go to Mecca, the holy city. Whether rich or poor, they go dressed in simple, seamless, white garments.

Islam teaches absolute monotheism and Mohammed's primacy as God's last Prophet on Earth. Stress is on the brotherhood of believers, nondifference of religious and secular life, obedience to God's Law, abstinence from alcohol, good conduct and the limitation of all except Allah. Today Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion.

*There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is the Messenger of Allah.*

SHAHADA (ISLAMIC DECLARATION OF FAITH)

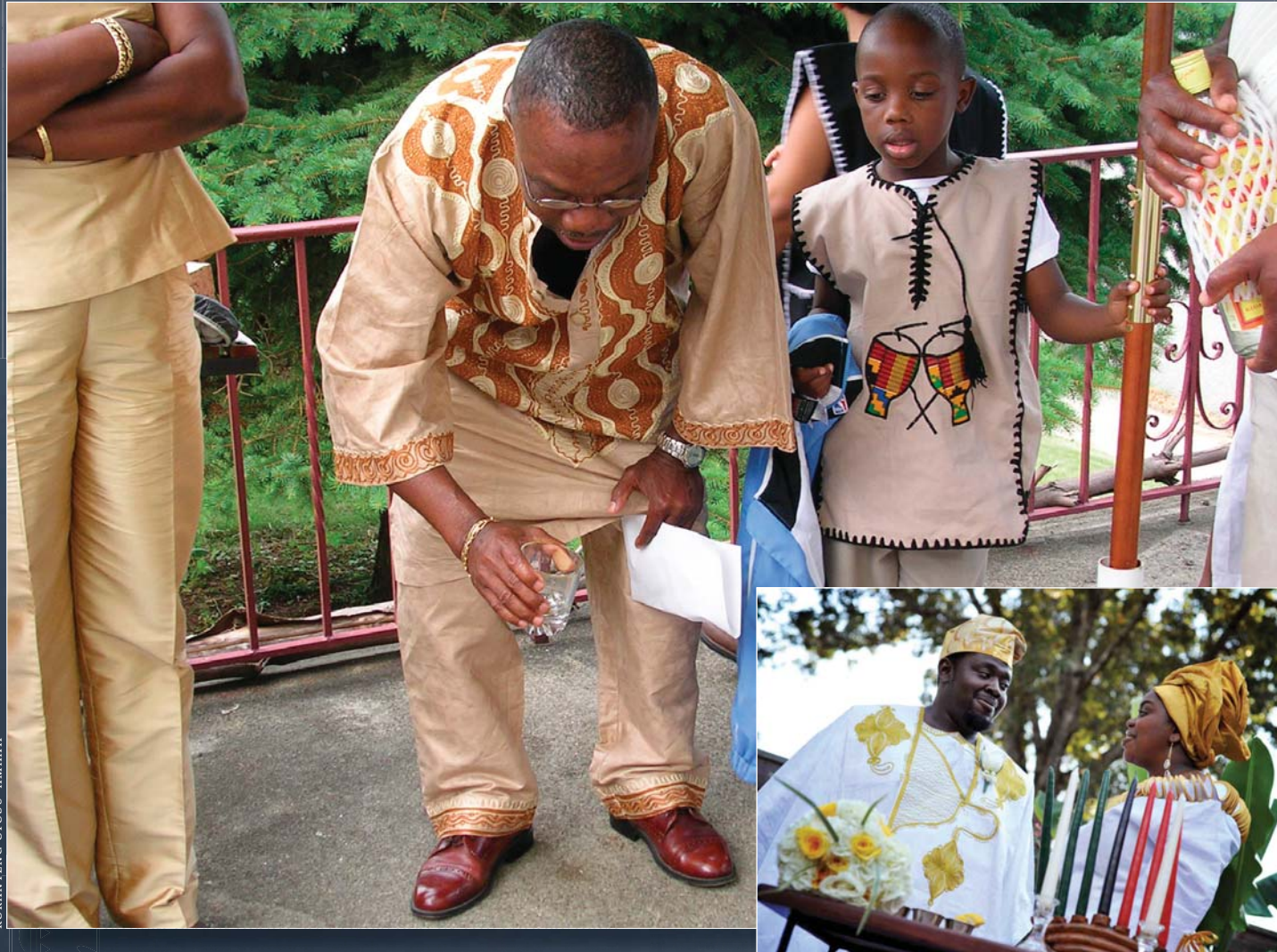
### THE GOALS OF ISLAM

The primary goal of Islam is to enjoy eternal life, both physical and spiritual, in heaven with Allah. Heaven is a paradise in which all the joys and pleasures abound, in which one lives amid beautiful gardens and fountains, enjoying the choicest foods served by sweet maidens. Man is the noblest creation of God, ranking above the angels. It is the sacred duty of Muslims to convert others to the Islamic faith. Islam has an ardent conviction that it is the only true religion, the only path to salvation. From this belief arises an extraordinary zeal to share the faith and to convert others. The ideal human society is an Islamic theocracy.

### PATH OF ATTAINMENT

Total submission to Allah is the single path to salvation, and even that is no guarantee, for Allah may desire even a faithful soul to experience misery. The good Muslim surrenders all pride, the chief among sins, and follows explicitly the will of Allah as revealed in the *Koran* by His last and greatest prophet, Mohammed. This and this alone brings a full and meaningful life and avoids the terrors of Hell which befall sinners and infidels. He believes in the Five Doctrines and observes the Five Pillars. The virtues of truthfulness, temperance and humility before God are foremost for Islam, and the practices of fasting, pilgrimage, prayer and charity to the Muslim community are most necessary to please Allah. The five doctrines are: 1) There is only one true God, Allah. 2) There are angels, chief of whom is Gabriel. 3) There are four inspired books: the *Torah* of Moses, the *Zabur* (Psalms) of David, the *Injil* (Gospel) of Jesus, and the *Koran*, Allah's final message, which supersedes all other scriptures. 4) There have been numerous prophets of Allah, culminating in Mohammed, the Last Prophet. 5) There will be a final Day of Judgment and Resurrection. A sixth, but optional, doctrine is belief in *kismet*, "fate" or "destiny."





## FAITHS

When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. Live your life so that when you die, the world cries and you rejoice. A CHEROKEE ADAGE

### A SAMPLING OF FAITHS

In his search for the Divine, man has created innumerable smaller religions, often called faiths. These spiritual paths are often charismatic or mystical in source or nature and have a powerful spiritual presence despite being numerically small. A few examples:

**SPIRITUALISM:** Spiritualism holds that there is another, perhaps deeper, reality on "the other side" which can be contacted by mediums or psychics who have sufficient sensitivity. It is one of the oldest forms of communion.

**SHAMANISM:** This broad term includes the thousands of tribal faiths which have existed on every continent since long before recorded history. Beliefs include a deep sense of the sacredness of life and of the Earth, communion with spirit guides and in the ability of man to live in harmony with and influence nature.

**THEOSOPHY:** Inspired by Hinduism and Buddhism and founded in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel H.S. Olcott, Theosophy

emphasizes mystical experience, esoteric doctrines and monism. Theosophists seek universal brotherhood, exploring the unexplained laws of nature and the psychic powers latent in man.

**UNIVERSALISM:** Many faiths are based on universalist principles, often as a conscious effort to avoid certain doctrines which are seen as narrow or sectarian. Universalism arises in all religions, whether Christian (Unitarianism), Islam (Baha'i) or Hindu (dozens of integrating movements, such as those of Satya Sai Baba, Krishnamurti and Maharshi Mahesh Yogi).

### OTHER FAITHS

Among thousands of other faiths are: indigenous people's tribal religions, Shamanism, Druidism, Anthroposophy, Swedenborgianism, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Scientology, Eckankar, channeling, Wicca, Paganism, occultism, Subud, mysticism, Freemasonry, Satan worship, Huna, Voodoo, Santeria, Sufism, Rosicrucianism, Christian Science and Religious Science.



## SCHOLASTIC MILESTONES

# Safeguarding Hinduism's Essence & History

An in-depth review of the long-awaited 11-volume encyclopedia

A BOOK REVIEW BY KOENRAAD ELST

DECADES OF EFFORT BY HUNDREDS of scholars have brought to completion the 11-volume *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, the brainchild of the Hindu Heritage Foundation and Swami Chidananda Saraswati of Parmarth Niketan, and published by Mandala Publishing. In its 25-year gestation, first Prof. K.L. Seshagiri Rao and then Prof. Kapil Kapoor served as its general editor. Kapoor wrote an scholarly introduction. With a foreword by Dr. Karan Singh, the work contains contributions by over 1500 scholars in 7500 articles. These deal with saints, kings, language, history, arts and crafts, temples, pilgrimages, philosophies and concepts. Space is also given to meritorious Indologists and to foreigners inspired by Hindu thought and culture, from ancient Chinese to modern American. Most persons, temples and festivals are illustrated with



photographs or paintings. Full indexes, the hallmark of professional reference books, allows readers to find any significant term in the articles. The basic production values are good for India, at the normal standard for an academic publications. A major plus is color photos, though individual photo credits are

**A work of many minds:** (above) The beautifully hardbound set; (left) a gathering of the board in Kentucky, July 8, 2012, with Swami Chidananda seated in front

not given, only a bulk list of contributors. A negative is the lack of hyphenation. Articles could use more refined editing, which will hopefully happen if the work is put online.

Specialists of each department of the vast domain of Hinduism might find fault with the compressed way their pet subject gets treated, but completeness is not of this world. The articles constitute good introductions to their topics, and the truly interested reader is invited to proceed from there. At least he is not being misled by gross mistakes, as would be the case with the many flawed contributions on easily the most-





**Rajasthan:** (a 900-word entry) A state of northwest India, historically inhabited by valorous people. The state spans approximately 132,152 square miles (342,239 sq. km) and has a population of 56,507,188, going by the 2001 census. Earlier the state was known as Rajaputna; it was only during the last days of the British Raj that its name changed to Rajasthan. In Puranic times it was called Pariyatra.... Rajasthan has a variety of landforms, including deserts, mountains, arable lands, and grazing lands. The state experiences varied climatic conditions from rainfall to extremely hot and cold weather conditions to sandstorms. River Chambal is the longest of the state rivers. Banas and Banganga are the other two big rivers....



**Festival Art:** (a 2,400-word entry) Various art forms like music, dance, drama, graphic arts, sculpture, architecture, and urban transformations are connected with a festival. Festival art underscores the fact that there are no divisions among art, craft, and religion, which are embedded in the whole of Hindu life.... The involvement of lay people is a prominent feature of festival art. Pongal, celebrated by the Tamils of South India, calls for cleaning up and painting houses, offices, shops, and factories. Doorways are decorated and decorative patterns (kolams) are drawn on floors and yards with rice flour, red clay, and colored powder. This practice of decorating the house for Pongal has a parallel in Onam, Kerala's most impressive festival, where women use flower petals to decorate the floors of their courtyards with designs that are often scenes from Puranas....



**Nataraja:** (an 1,100-word entry) Literally, the Lord of dancers, a brilliant artistic representation of Lord Siva. According to a Tamil text Unmai Vilakkam: "Creation arises from the drum; protection proceeds from the hand of hope; from the fire proceeds destruction; the foot held aloft gives release." The dance is interpreted in terms of five activities, viz., creation, preservation, destruction, giving an appearance of illusion, and salvation or grace (shrishti, sthiti, samhara, tirobhava and anugraha). It is also interpreted in terms of yoga. The image is said to embody the inner processes by which the coiled kundalini or serpent-power is realized or straightened. The Siva Nataraja form, according to a distinguished art critic, is a synthesis of science, religion and art. Images of Siva Nataraja in bronze, executed during the Chola period (9th to 12th century ce), stand at the peak of Indian sculptural expression. Nataraja images are found both in temples and museums. There are but a few temples having Nataraja as the main Deity, but Nataraja images are found in most Siva temples.

consulted source, Wikipedia. That might be a decent source on neutral topics like physics, but on Hindu subjects it is emphatically not recommended by the specialists. Nor is any contributor to the *Encyclopedia* grossly biased; they are truer to its scholarly ethic of being a neutral and non-controversial source of information. This, again, will come as a pleasant surprise for those who rely too much on Wikipedia, where many topics of serious debate have been hijacked by one of the contending parties, shutting the other party's version out or ridiculing it. In the present case, we are dealing with a real scholarly work.

#### Accuracy

An important criterion for scholarliness is: how does the work deal with certainties, probabilities and uncertainties? Are they properly reflected, or are they all replaced with a quasi-religious certainty? Generally, factual uncertainty is simply conceded, e.g., the entry *Vikramaditya* says: "Conflicting theories have been put forward by historians regarding the real origin of King Vikramaditya and his dynasty."

Chronology is a major problem in Hindu history, and this is frankly admitted: "Tiruvalluvar's age is also not known properly. There are different viewpoints." The *Shankaracharya* entry primarily dates Shankara's birth to the 8th century, as accepted by Orientalists, but also mentions that some of his followers place his birth around 500 bce, though implying a clear preference for the former option. On the origins of the Vedic people, the *Arya* entry simply gives the existing theories. One of these is the contentious Aryan Invasion Theory, which is correctly treated as still a valid contender, but juxtaposed with rival theories. This instills confidence in the reader; the concession of uncertainty implies that when certainty is assumed, the given explanation has been corroborated by the latest research.

Given the numerous contributors, however, not all are equally rigorous. On occasion an author proves a bit too eager to embrace an insufficiently proven hypothesis, e.g., the *Sanatana Dharma* entry mentions as fact that the Mayas in Central and the Incas in South America had borrowed much from the Hindus. While this need not be impossible, it is at least controversial. An encyclopedia is not the place to launch daring theories; it should just summarize the non-contentious information agreed upon by experts.

Sometimes a defect in one entry is compensated by the hoped-for information under another entry. The *Chaturyuga* entry (the Four World Ages) simply gives the usual Puranic story believed by most Hindus, with the world ages having astronomical time-spans, without asking any questions. It does

not mention the hypothesis that the Chaturyuga (a very ancient concept held by non-Indian peoples as well) later got filled in with a numerical value which coincidentally approximates the precession cycle of less than 26,000 years. Yet this hypothesis is in tune with all we know about the Indian reception and elaboration of the Hellenistic discovery of precession, i.e., the cycle which the constellations make vis-à-vis the equinox. This is not merely an invention by the much-lambasted Orientalists; it was also opined in writing by, for instance, Sri Yukteswar in 1894. However, the entry *Yuga* does give a more historical account, specifying that in the late-Vedic *Vedanga Jyotisha*, the word still meant a period of five years, a much more modest magnitude than in the *Puranas*. The entry *Dvapara Yuga* specifies how the jump from manageable time-spans (with the four ages spanning 12,000 years, or roughly half of the precession cycle) to the Puranic astronomical time-spans was made: the years were interpreted as "divine years" and hence multiplied by 360.

Perhaps inevitably, few plain mistakes have managed to pass the editorial sieve. Thus, the entry *Sahasrara Chakra*, "thousand-spoked wheel," speaks of the *Shatachakra Nirupana*, which means "investigation of the hundred wheels," but this classic 16th-century sourcebook about the chakras is actually called the *Shatchakra Nirupana*, "investigation of the six wheels." This was a spelling error.

So, while encyclopedia entries have to be handled with care, yet it is a treasure-trove of information. This review focuses on potentially controversial points, but most users will be more interested in the biographies of saints, the history of philosophical schools or the description of temples, which make up the bulk of this work.

#### Sectarianism

There are, however, three subtler or more implicit dangers found in this type of project. One is Hindu sectarianism: many contributors have pledged allegiance to one particular sect, and this might shine through. In a number of "Hinduism" schoolbooks used in England and Holland which the present writer has evaluated, it was found that while the authors certainly had toned down their sectarian biases, still their allegiances often remained visible. Thus, a description of Shiva or Saraswati as a "demi-god" is a give-away of ISKCON (Hare Krishna) theology, while a reduction of the many Gods to "different manifestations of the one God" betrays an Arya Samaj viewpoint. That need not be a problem, but in the case of an encyclopedia, readers might hold it up for criticism.

In the present work, this tendency seems to have been avoided. Presumably, the different sects and their doctrines and temples

have been described each by its own votaries, who had no axe to grind against it. Instead, and understandably, some articles seem to reflect modern scholarly theories to the exclusion of others. Thus, the entry *Vishvamitra* gives a particular account of the Vedic "Battle of the Ten Kings" (viz. putting the Bharata dynasty among the Vedic king Sudas's enemies) that is popular in university courses because it applies the Aryan invasion scenario; but it is not really supported by the original Vedic report. This, therefore would not be accepted by a dissenting school of thought. Even this modern sectarianism is kept to a minimum, though. Thus, the entry *Hindu Eras* simply juxtaposes the different interpretations of the existing calendar systems or the different dates attributed to the *Mahabharata* war.

#### The Borders of Hinduism

A second problem might be what is *not* treated. Thus, many North Indian Hindus have never heard of the ancient Tamil grammar *Tolkappiyam* or the poet Tiruvalluvar. While they might have heard of the Chola empire or the Virashaiva sect. These may not really form part of their Hindu consciousness. Traditions insistently described by Christian missionaries as "not Hindu"—especially the Indian "Scheduled Tribes"—are similarly regarded by many Hindus. They may not openly describe the tribals as un-Hindu, but they don't actively include them in their mental horizon. If this encyclopedia is to be considered a compendium of all available knowledge on Hinduism, then it should either include these borderline communities or write them definitively off as not belonging to the Hindu fold.

South India is sufficiently included: each of the Dravidian names and terms mentioned has an ample entry. Many lesser saints and temples are also dealt with. On the tribal front, the picture is less systematic, more haphazard. There is an entry *Thang-ta* ("sword-spear") for the martial art of Manipur, of which even the existence is probably known only to very few readers. On the other hand, an important term like *sarna*, "sacred grove," the physical center of worship for the tribes of the Chotanagpur plateau, is absent. Sacred trees are still common in popular Hinduism, and connect with the open-air fire rituals of the Vedic age, which differ from the later temple worship. But then, the entry *Santal*, the name of one of these tribes, does give a lengthy account of their religious practices centered around the Bongas, roughly equivalent to the devas. It also mentions the "sacred grove." Similarly, there are entries like *Hill People of Tamil Nadu*. Much information about the tribals is also indirectly given in entries like *Ritual Arts and Crafts of Arunachal Pradesh*.

The interference by Christianity and Is-





**Rama-Janmabhumi Temple (Ayodhya):** (a 900-word entry) Ayodhya is located on the right bank of the Sarayu in Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh. The ancient ruins over here lie within a circuit of about 4km and at places rise to a height of about 10 meters above the surrounding ground level. According to Valmiki's Ramayana, Ayodhya was the capital of the Kosala kingdom, which was once ruled by a king named Dasharatha. His son Rama is regarded by the Hindus as an incarnation of Vishnu.... ¶ On the spot known as Rama-Janmabhumi, a mosque was constructed in 1585–86 ce by Mir Baqi, who was an administrator during the reign of Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India. This is indicated by an inscription on a stone slab which used to be there on the facade, above the central arch of the mosque. Another inscription, said to have been there on the southern side of the pulpit, stated that the construction was done under orders from Babur himself. ¶ The mosque, which no longer exists, was of a modest size, having only three single bays with the corresponding arches in front. However, to the piers of the mosque had been affixed as many as fourteen black stone pillars which bore typical motifs and figures, clearly showing that the pillars originally belonged to a Hindu temple....



**Sthapati (in architecture):** (a 1,000-word entry) Sthapati is a professional title of the chief architect who designs, controls and oversees the construction of a temple, palace or any major building. The art of sthapatya (architecture) experienced a steady decline during the hundred and fifty years of British rule in India. Though the British made efforts to preserve the architectural heritage by establishing a Department of Archeology, they did not encourage the growth of the traditional art of architecture. It was citizens of certain pockets in India, for example, Nattukottai Chettians, and some communities like the Jains in Gujarat, who patronized traditional architects and sculptors and kept their art alive....

## The work includes over 7,000 entries



**Ashtasakhi:** (an 800-word entry) The eight closest female friends and companions of Radha.... These eight women are considered foremost among the gopis of Radha's entourage. In Vaishnava thought, they are almost as esteemed as the Deities themselves, as they are considered to be spiritually evolved beings (or states of mind for the more evolved seekers), capable of granting special audiences and favors. Their function is to facilitate the permanent play (lila) of Radha and Krishna in an unearthly dimension of sacred space and time.... In Pushtimarg literature, Krishna is supposed to incarnate (avatarita) with his entire entourage from Goloka, with Radha, the gopis, gopas, the cows and the calves in the Braja area specified for His sport (liladhama... Gopis are divided into groups according to the mental attitude in which they adore Krishna; svakiya (married) or parakiya (not married to him)...



lam with Hinduism is given practically no attention, though one article deals with Hindu-Christian interaction. Of course, Hindu civilization as subject matter for an encyclopedia is already big enough. Thus, the entry *Ayodhya* deals with the place's temples, famous characters and significance for the Hindus, but pays only minimal attention to the temple/mosque conflict that became front-page news across the world. Most Muslim stalwarts, including the main destroyers of temples and persecutors of "unbelievers," are simply not mentioned. The 17th-century Mughul prince Dara Shikoh has an entry, but that is because he tried to integrate Hinduism into a state syncretism (which never durably materialized because Dara was killed by his more orthodox brother, Aurangzeb) and translated the *Upanishads* into Persian. This translation was then rendered into French and triggered a first wave of European enthusiasm for Hinduism.

### Telescope Effect

A third danger apparent in too many Hindu writings on Hinduism (and most of the authors here are practicing Hindus) is the "telescope effect," viz., that phenomena from very different eras are all seen on a one-dimensional canvas, "the past," routinely called the "Vedic" age. Thus, the ancient astrology termed Vedic—the determination of auspicious times on the basis of the 28 lunar assterisms—tends to get conflated with the imported Hellenistic horoscopy based on the 12-part Zodiac, which is advertised in numerous books as "Vedic."

There is an insufficient realization that institutions and concepts also have a history. Many entries are given the definition that "tradition holds" or that is "traditionally believed." But it is the job of an encyclopedia to be critical vis-à-vis what is generally believed. Thus, the word *Upanishad* is traditionally explained as "sitting down at the feet (of the guru)." This may even be true, but it seems the entry *Upanishad* should have mentioned the dissidence among modern scholars who think that it means "metaphor."

This need for historicity may concern major topics of Hindu history, such as the caste system. Among enemies of Hinduism, it is common to project caste at its worst onto the entire Hindu past, then to conclude that "caste is intrinsic to Hinduism." What is meant here is the hoped-for death of Hinduism itself: "If we want to abolish caste, we have to destroy Hinduism itself." Though this is a life-and-death issue for Hinduism, we find that many unthinking Hindus espouse this same projection, perhaps because in the glory days of caste it was equally upheld as eternal and unchanging. But the scholarly finding is that it has indeed changed. Caste in the age of the Rig-Vedic "Family Books," India's old-

est documents, was non-existent, or at least never mentioned. Later it was understood to be hereditary though only in the fatherly line, and for the last 2,000 years it was the boxed-in endogamous institution that we have come to know.

Moreover, the Western term *caste* conflates two very different concepts known to all Hindus: *varna*, "color/category," the four classes typical of any complex society, with counterparts in other cultures; and *jati*, "birth-group," the thousands of endogamous communities, an institution stretching deep into tribal society and largely existing even among Indian Christians and Muslims. When tribes were integrated into expanding Vedic society, they were allowed to retain their distinctive mores and especially the continuation of their separateness through endogamy. Thus, as low-caste leader Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar observed, tribes became castes. This was an application of the principle of nonviolence: integration without hurting the pre-existing group identity. The entry *Caste* vaguely nods towards this principle of historicity, and it gives examples of how people in the Vedic age chose their own professions regardless of what their families had been doing. But it might have discussed the need for historicity more pointedly, especially as this topic is so controversial and much in need of clarification.

As one example of this illusion of an unchanging institution, many Hindus know the Vedic sages Vishvamitra and Vasishtha only through their adventures in a Puranic story where the quarrel between them is explained in caste terms. These caste considerations are completely absent in the sages' original Rig Vedic appearances. This later addition of the caste angle is satisfactorily explained under the entry *Vishvamitra*.

For another example: according to the entry *Asura*, the Family Books call the dragon Vritra an asura, a term which had not yet acquired a negative connotation. But he is also described as a Brahmin, at least according to the younger epic *Mahabharata*, which applies to the Vritra-slayer Indra the law that people had to do penance for the sin of killing a Brahmin. This is apparently a projection of Rama's penance for killing the Brahmin Ravana. Here, the primary mention of Vritra in the *Rig Veda* should have been clearly distinguished from the later elaboration in the Epics, which drag in an anachronistic caste angle. It seems that the final editing of the Epics coincided with the promotion of caste to a central feature of Hinduism.

### Accounting for Change

We discern in the foreword a learned version of what most Hindus nowadays will tell you when asked to describe their religion—and it nicely illustrates the problem. By summarizing the main traits of Hinduism, it at once

shows the pitfalls in an enterprise like this: it doesn't sufficiently realize that the basic Hindu concepts have a history, too; the South Indian and tribal traditions are conspicuous by their absence; and Hinduism gets reduced to one (admittedly large and normative) of its forms, viz., the Vedic or Brahmanical lineage.

Thus it lists four *purusharthas* or goals of life in Hinduism. These lists appear in numerous Hindu catechism books and introductory works. Yet, if we apply the exacting standards of an encyclopedia, this is only partly true. Originally there were only three goals of life: *kama*/sensuality, *artha*/lucre and *dharma*/ethics. The latter category included all religion-related activities, everything that deals with the relation of the part (the individual) with the whole (the universal). The notion of *mukti* or *moksha*, "liberation," did not appear until the *Upanishads*—and it was elevated to a goal of life only after liberation-centric Buddhism became popular. An encyclopedia must give an account of this history, against the unhistorical tendency among contemporary believers to absolutize the fourfold scheme with which they happen to be familiar.

Similarly, among the stages of life (ashramas) there were originally only three: as pupil devoted to knowledge, as householder and pillar of society, and as an elderly man withdrawing into the forest, literally or figuratively. The best-known example of the latter stage is when the seer Yajnavalkya ends his married life and launches the all-important doctrine of the Self in a farewell speech to his wife Maitreyi. The category of sannyas, renunciation, did not exist yet. The difference with the third stage, *vanaprastha*, "forest-dweller," is that the latter came after the householder stage, while sannyas replaced the householder stage altogether. It implied asceticism not as a stage of life but as a lifelong vocation and was marked by specific rituals which an aging family man did not undergo. It was practiced by the *munis*, mentioned in the *Rig Veda* in the third person as marginal wanderers—definitely distinct from the Vedic Seers themselves, who were court-priests or otherwise members of an elite in the center of society. But then prince Siddhartha Gautama, patronized by the kings and rich magnates, created his own very successful sect of celibate monks. Only in those new circumstances, at least according to modern scholarship, did the Brahmin establishment feel the need to integrate the lifestyle of sannyas as a fourth life stage. Even then, a moment's reflection will show that this "stage" sat uneasily next to that of *vanaprastha*.

The foreword also lists four types of yoga, just as you will find in the works of Swami Vivekananda. Most Hindus nowadays will agree that there is karma yoga, jnana yoga





AMIT MISRA

**Hiranyakeshiya Grihya Sutra:** (a 250-word entry) A work relating to the household fire. These texts on Vedic rituals are said to have been written between 800 and 300 bce. In the first two chapters, the rites of upanayana (ceremony of initiation) and the rituals of marriage are described. In the subsequent chapters other household ceremonies such as simantonnayana (a ritual to be performed during a woman's first pregnancy), punsavana (a rite performed in order to obtain male progeny), jatakarma (a ceremony to be conducted immediately after childbirth), and namakarana (child-naming ceremony) are discussed. The paka yajna, a minor rite performed in the household fire, is also described. As in the case of Baudhayana Grihya Sutra, there is a chapter known as Shesha Sutra (supplementary aphorisms) attached to this work. It consists of eight sub-divisions (patalas). In these aphorisms, many rituals are described that are observed in one's daily life....

and bhakti yoga, as well as raja yoga. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the first three are called karma marga, "the path of action;" jnana marga, "the path of knowledge;" and bhakti marga, "the path of devotion." They are not called yoga, and certainly not the high-definition yoga described in Patanjali's *Yoga-Sutra*: "Yoga is the stopping of the mind's motions" (which this encyclopedia, following Vivekananda, equates with raja yoga). The *Gita* did not pretend that bhakti, the loving concentration on a divine person different from oneself, is a form of self-immersion, which yoga is. Indeed, the foreword elsewhere quotes the bhakti poet Kabir as writing that yoga is of no use. Not that either yoga or bhakti is bad for you, but they are different from one another. Reliance on a God is different from reliance on oneself. This used to be well understood, for instance in the 16th-century polemic between the bhakti master Guru Nanak and the Nath Yogis. It is a sign of the increasing illiteracy in Hinduism among modern Hindus (a problem aggravated by secularist education) that the two are conflated into "bhakti yoga." A conceptually precise encyclopedia would be welcomed as a tool for setting the record straight.

The foreword is an interesting starting point. It is no surprise that, for instance, it takes the Aryan invasion for granted; this is the scenario that most Hindus were spoon-fed throughout the colonial and Nehruvian age, although modern research has challenged the theory. But in the body of an encyclopedia proper we expect (and usually find) higher standards. Its handling of Hindu concepts should be critical rather than pious. Otherwise it would only be an oversized catechism.

So, how do these threefolds or fourfolds fare in this encyclopedia? The article on purushartha defines these as the "four goals of life," but then separates dharma, artha and

kama as the *trivarga*, the "division in three." It locates these in the empirical world, whereas moksha is said to deal with the spiritual world. The threefold scheme is mentioned, but not sufficiently given historical justice; its seniority is not explained. Thus we see a compromise between the scholarly, objective approach and that of contemporary believers. This pattern repeats itself throughout this encyclopedia under many of the controversial, historically eventful or ideology-laden entries. Don't expect any lambasting of conventional schemes or merciless historicizing of commonly used concepts, the approach that many Western Indologists take pride in. On the other hand, in most cases the facts the reader will need are indeed given, but only in passing, without any emphasis. Admittedly, in a project of this magnitude there is no room for emphasis.

#### Arya, Dasa, Asura

*Arya* is defined as "noble," its classical meaning, but also as the self-referential term of the Vedic Aryans, its Vedic meaning. This is entirely correct, though the latter meaning could have been clarified further by stating that the Hittites and Iranians also referred to themselves by related words. Thus everyone used it in the sense of "us" as against "them." It was originally a relative ethnic term, with the Iranians considering all others, including the Vedic people, as "them." One man's Arya is another man's Anarya, and vice versa. In India, as the Vedic tribe (the Pauravas and their subtribe, the Bharatas) became identified with the word Arya, this term came to mean "Vedic," "civilized," and hence "noble," as opposed to the uncultured people who had not been exposed to the Vedic tradition. So, the text of the encyclopedia is correct but incomplete. To convey actual understanding, a bit more information would have been helpful.

*Dasa*, nowadays "servant," very clearly referred to the Iranians, as did Dasyu, Pani and probably Shudra. The first three have Iranian equivalents and are known in Iranian texts from Greek and Iranian sources. The *Rig Veda* describes them as "without Indra," "without fire-sacrifice" and other known characteristics of the Mazdean (Zoroastrian) tradition. It is rank nonsense to assert that these terms have anything to do with "dark-skinned natives," as the Aryan Invasion Theory has inculcated in far too many people. Here, most Hindus including the authors under discussion are too defensive and fail to assert the Iranian origin of the words which later came to mean "servile class." The *Dasa* entry starts with the common meaning, "servant," then dilates upon its figurative religious meaning (as in the name Ramdas, "servant of Rama"), but doesn't give any information on the word's origins. This is already defective from a scholarly viewpoint, and it is also politically unwise, for the enemy has lost no time to propagate the notion that the "Dasas are the natives reduced to slavery by the Aryan invaders." In their dominant discourse, the fact that Hindus ignore this claim merely shows "Brahminical hypocrisy."

Similarly, the term *asura* again refers to the Iranians. At first, *asura* was virtually a synonym with *deva*, as correctly observed here. But by the time of the *Rig Veda*'s tenth and youngest book, after the war with the Iranians (Battle of the Ten Kings and Varshagira battle, the latter featuring Zarathushtra's patron king Vishtaspa), the two terms had ethnically grown apart: *deva* meant "deity" for the Indians, "devil" for the Iranians; and with *asura/ahura*, it was the reverse. In war psychology, everything relating to the Iranians was demonized. By the time the two sides became friends again, the term *asura* had frozen in its meaning of "demon" and became associated with all kinds of en-

emies or evils unrelated to its original ethnic connotations.

#### Separate Sects

Another criterion for evaluating a work on Hinduism with scholarly pretensions is: does it account for the vexed question whether Buddhism, Sikhi (as Sikhs call Sikhism), etc., are part of Hinduism or are separate religions? Politicians and half-baked intellectuals treat Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and the tribal traditions as separate religions, whether from the calculation that being nice to the separatist lobbies pays on election day, or out of sheer anti-Hindu animus. Anti-Hindu policies have even driven the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission into claiming non-Hindu status. Yet, a truly historical view would treat them all as just so many sects within the sectarian continuum called Hinduism.

This encyclopedia gives a mixed picture. Implicitly, the continuity between these sects and developments within Hinduism is asserted in many articles. Thus, the entry Alara Kalama factually describes this teacher's importance in the Buddha's meditative career: the technique he taught led the Buddha to keep practicing meditation (while abandoning the self-mortification which other teachers had made him do) and to develop the Vipassana ("mindfulness") technique that gave him Liberation. The Buddha made his own version of Hinduism, as any Hindu guru is entitled to, and as arch-Hindus like the Vedic Seer Dirghatamas before him or the philosopher Shankara after him have also done. But he never broke away from any existing religion. On the contrary, when he was asked near the end of his life what the secrets of a stable society are, he mentioned among other things the continued respect for the existing sages, pilgrimages and (by definition pre-Buddhist) sacred places.

Likewise, central concepts of Sikhi are properly derived from ancient Hindu concepts, e.g., the mantra *So'ham* ("I am He," viz. He who lives in the sun) has Vedic origins but reappears in glory in Sikh scripture and practice. The entry *Dasham Granth* recounts how the last Sikh guru, Govind Singh, had stories from the *Puranas* translated for his flock. There are literally hundreds of indications for the view that Sikhi is just one among the many Hindu traditions. A scholar sometimes must speak truth to power and say unpleasant things merely because he has found them to be true. In this case, no matter how politically desirable it may seem to play along with Sikh separatism, the historical facts say with one voice that Sikhi is but a Hindu sect. Treating the Sikh gurus as non-Hindu is completely anachronistic: none of them ever realized that he was the leader of a new religion separate from Hinduism. Even Guru

Nanak's utterance: "There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim," falsely interpreted by separatists as an abdication from Hinduism, is a typically Hindu thing to say. In Islam, religious identity is everything: it decides whether you go to heaven (if Muslim) or to hell (if non-Muslim). By contrast, in Hinduism, it may mean something in this world but nothing ultimately: your mukti or liberation does not depend on what community you belong to, but whether you practice the spiritual path. When Mahatma Gandhi took an anti-identitarian position: "I am a Hindu, I am a Muslim, I am a Christian, I am a Sikh," his opponent Mohammed Ali Jinnah rightly commented: "That is a typically Hindu thing to say."

Then again, some of the entries concerning the Sikh gurus or the holy places of the Sikh sect do speak of "Sikhs and Hindus." The mere fact that they figure in an encyclopedia of Hinduism speaks sufficiently against the Sikh separatist position, but the editors have not wanted to press the point. Purists might say they have lapsed into politicians' talk in a concession to the recent and British-created phenomenon of Sikh separatism. But in fact it was wise to accommodate this separatism to some extent. Firstly, it is a matter of politeness; e.g., Muslims entirely follow the precedent behavior of Mohammed and hence could sensibly be called Mohammedans, but as they themselves prefer to be called Muslims, we courteously use that term. Secondly, an encyclopedia has to care about its reputation, which directly impacts on its capacity to function as an authoritative source of information. If it bluntly said, "Sikhs are Hindus," then it would be decried in many influential places as "Hindu chauvinist" or worse.


At any rate, if so many sects and individuals declare "We are not Hindu," it is not because they have doctrines or practices that are incompatible with Hinduism; this encyclopedia amply shows they are entirely embedded in Hindu history. It is only because Hinduism has lately acquired a bad name and is under attack from many sides, a situation that drives people away. This cannot be countered by Hindus insisting: "But you are Hindus!" The editorial decision not to make an issue of this is a correct one. But the day Hinduism wins back its glory, these sects will come flocking back and thump their chests: "We are Hindus, too! We are better Hindus than you!"

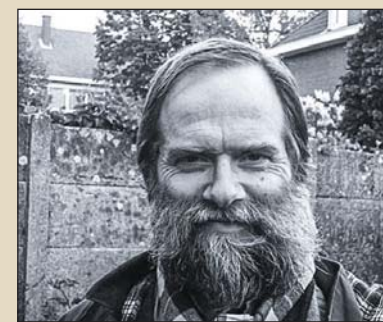
#### Conclusion

After surveying this encyclopedia, our judgment must be that it is a great, useful and necessary enterprise, but minorly marred by typically Hindu flaws. It admirably avoids the pitfalls of sectarianism and Indo-Aryan chauvinism, and greatly limits the telescope effect of equalizing all time-depths to just "the past." Indeed, the problem of anachro-

nism is much less serious than you'd fear when reading the kind of missives put out by "internet Hindus." The latter's defective sense of time-depth reaches ridiculous heights which anti-Hindu academics love to highlight, e.g., the claim that the Aryan migration of some five thousand years ago is the same as the spread of mankind from India northward more than fifty thousand years ago; or the claim that Rama lived a million years ago yet spoke the very same language that grammarians codified less than three thousand years ago; or the claim that "ancient Hindus conquered the world." Those pitfalls are completely avoided here. The sober facts about Hinduism make this civilization outstanding enough; it doesn't need these comical assertions.

The project was started near the end of the age of printing. Soon after, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* decided to drop its print edition and go exclusively online. It is fortunate that Hindus just made it with their printed encyclopedia. Future generations won't care anymore, but our generation still values a book more if it has appeared in print. To gain a foothold in the world of books as a solid reference, this printed version was necessary. On the other hand, for future editions it probably stands to reason that they will appear only online (the present reviewer read from a PDF rather than the 11 paper tomes). The advantage will be that any new information can speedily be added, and that any rare mistakes can be corrected forthwith.

The importance of this work in a Hindu self-reassertion is that Hindus have at last decided to speak for themselves. Whereas outsiders like Wendy Doniger can only speak of Hinduism in caricatures, here Hindus have given an account of their own understanding of their civilization. What we ourselves do, we do better. 



Koenraad Elst, born in 1959, is a Belgian Indologist and writer of several volumes about Indian history and Hindu revivalism, including controversial topics such as Ayodhya and the Aryan invasion.





# Thirteen Days of Mourning & Release

Ancient tradition meets a changing culture in Nepal

BY SALLY ACHARYA, NEPAL

ON THE PLANE FROM FINLAND, KOMAL Poudel imagined how happy her mother would be to see her. Finally, she thought, they'd have time to spend together. She could still picture Mother by the cooking fire, welcoming her home from school by saying, "Eat first, then study." Few girls in their village had gone to school in those days, so it was a bittersweet irony that her life abroad, which kept them apart, would never have happened without her mother's pioneering spirit. Now her mother was in the hospital with asthma, but everyone said she was doing fine. Komal couldn't wait to give her a hug.

Relatives met her at the Kathmandu airport and they all piled into a car. "Let's go directly to the hospital," Komal urged. There was a

sudden silence. "Auntie," said one relative gently, "we have to go to Pashupati." It felt to Komal as if her world went dark; Mother had passed away.

In today's Kathmandu, Pashupati means a lot of things. The ancient temple to Shiva called Pashupatinath is one of the most important pilgrimage sites in the Hindu world. Its surrounding grounds are a popular spot for morning walks, a favored place for major family rituals and a frequent destination on casual outings that include a quick stop for darshan. If you're a Hindu in Kathmandu, you'll go there often, and it's usually a pleasant occasion.

But Komal knew what it meant at that dark moment. Up to 95 percent of all people who pass away in Kathmandu are cremated on the ghats by the temple, estimates Govinda

Tandan, member secretary of the Pashupati Area Development Trust. On some days there are over 50 funerals. Few tourists who snap pictures of the shrouded, marigold-covered bodies burning along the Bagmati River realize that unlike Western funerals that happen many days after death, the person being cremated typically passed away just a few hours earlier and the family's grief is woefully fresh.

And so it was that Komal, with her suitcase still in the car and her legs shaking, found herself approaching the yellow-wrapped body of the mother she had longed to hug. All around was a sad blur of activity: lighting the fire, circling the pyre, chanting the prayers. Then she and her siblings retired to a bare, brick-floored room a few hundred yards from the riverbank to experience the evolving culture of mourning in the modern Hindu world.



**Thirteen Days in a Separate Space**

The Kriyaputri Bhawan is a kind of ashram for mourners where pujas are conducted, visitors received and emotions healed. A few years ago it was a ramshackle building with only a dozen rooms, and while mourning near Pashupatinath was prized in theory, conditions were cramped and services were minimal. Now it would be hard to find a resident of Kathmandu who hasn't been to the Kriyaputri Bhawan. An estimated 15,000 people come by each month, and its 52 rooms have been consistently full since it was expanded with the help of funds from Upen-dra Mahato. "If we had 500 rooms, they'd be full, too. There's that much demand," Tandan explains.

The popularity of the Kriyaputri Bhawan can be traced in part to the way it answers a

problem: How can traditions be maintained in a changing world? Even though Hindu practices are deeply embedded in everyday life in Nepal, where 81 percent are Hindu and Hinduism was the state religion until 2006, the prescribed 13 days of mourning involve a set of rituals and restrictions that are increasingly hard to follow in urbanized, tight-packed Kathmandu.

To fully picture this clash of worlds, think of a village like the one where Komal grew up. The family's priest would live close by, and there would be helpers to find everything for rituals, much of which would be available easily at little or no cost: kusha grass, betel nuts and coconuts to represent the Gods; home-made leaf plates that would be ritually pure; a cow to aid symbolically in the journey to the afterlife.

**The strength of family:** (left) Children of Devaka Poudel offer blessings, and (right) participate in puja on the final day of her mourning ritual

Space would be created and purified in a corner of the home for mourners to sleep on the floor with their heads to the north (the position in which the body was burned). Crowds that came to offer condolences would be fed by neighbors and distant relatives not in deep mourning; and the taboo against touching a mourner, who is ritually impure, would ensure a level of privacy and personal space for the grieving family. Extended family and friends would gather on porches and under shade trees as the immediate family and priest conducted rituals passed down from an





PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY



**Assisting the deceased:** (far left) The family carries on the legacy of the deceased by offering prayers, blessings and gifts to relatives with whom she had a relationship of respect; (left) rituals to purify the mourner and nourish the soul of the deceased are conducted daily throughout the mourning period

visitors.

Everyone, though, knows Pashupatinath. And at the Kriyaputri Bhawan, everything is available for mourners, from ritual items to a peaceful environment to a connection with the cycles of life. "It helps that everyone here is going through the same experience," offers Pushpa Kumal Subedi, a demography professor mourning his mother-in-law. "In a village, you would have neighbors saying, 'This is the nature of life.' The city isn't like that. But here everyone has lost someone and they understand."

ancient world with a rural heart.

That's still the way many people live in Nepal, but not in Kathmandu. Flats are crowded, and even families with large homes often live on one floor and rent out the rest for extra

income. There is little space for major rituals or throngs of visitors. And since Kathmandu has few street names or addresses, a family mourning at home spends a lot of time on the cell phone, giving directions to hundreds of

## Patron Rejuvenates Kathmandu Landmark

BY SALLY ACHARYA, NEPAL

**T**he Kriyaputri Bhawan at Pashupati has become a central part of the mourning process in Kathmandu since it was expanded with the help of a business leader from the diaspora, Upendra Mahato, who lives in Russia. The \$450,000 project included the construction of a new building, reconstruction and extension of an old building, and the restoration and expansion of gardens, ponds, temples and water facilities. Work was completed and handed over to the Pashupati Area Development Trust in two phases, in 2005 and 2011, although the trust named for Dr. Mahato's mother continues to be engaged with maintenance and reconstruction. HINDUISM TODAY asked Upendra about the project.

**Q:** What inspired you to fund this particular cause?

**A:** A country cannot prosper sustainably if it ignores the spiritual development of its people. Spirituality is nothing but the deepest values and meanings by which people live. With this realization, the Trust has invested in various projects, including this one, that promote spiritual development of people.

I saw the plight of people staying for 13 long days to perform mourning rituals in the old Kriya Putri Bhawan after the death of their loved ones. Although the facility lacked basic services, there were long queues and it was crowded. That convinced me to fund the cause. The Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) has a useful program called Public Participation for the Development (PPD). The Kriyaputri Bhawan, built in two phases, is the result of the cooperation between my Trust, the Phul Kumari Mahato Memorial Trust, and PADT under the PPD program.

**Q:** What is the importance to you personally of the mourning rituals in Hindu culture?

I am not strictly a religious person, but I try to follow rituals as a personal effort to preserve our rich and unique cultural identity. Spirituality is an integral part of our culture. The mourning rituals are a very emotional and personal affair. However, I personally think the ritual needs a serious amendment; it should be less rigorous for



The Kriyaputri Bhawan at Pashupati has been visited by an estimated 15,000 mourners per month since its expansion and renovation

the person performing it.

**Q:** Can you share your thoughts on the role of philanthropy in development?

**A:** The Phul Kumari Mahato Memorial Trust, established in 2004 in the loving memory of my mother, has an objective to participate in the development of the country through social and charitable works. I strongly believe that those who have resources must contribute towards uplifting the social and economic status of marginalized people and communities. I passionately appeal to my non-resident Nepali friends dispersed all over the world to realize that responsibility and contribute both financially and intellectually for the peace and prosperity of our beloved motherland. If we do it, our foreign friends will follow suit.





PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY

### Powerful Stories

At sunrise, hundreds of mourners wake up to bathe in crystalline spring water from the waterspouts, step into natural rice-straw sandals for purity's sake and wrap themselves in yards of unsewn white cloth as a sign of purity and peace. In this democracy of grief, it's impossible to tell if a mourner is a laborer or a teacher, a taxi driver or a doctor from Virginia. Take away the cell phones and spectacles, and they could be their own ancestors. It's hard to miss the powerful impression that each person is just the current link in a long unbroken chain.

Outside the door of each family's room is a garlanded photo of the person being mourned, so that walking the veranda is a glimpse of lives remembered. Chanting in Sanskrit comes for hours from the courtyard where final pujas are conducted, while the square is flanked by a line of shrines for daily rituals. A typical mourner staying for 13 days will easily catch a glimpse of some 500 separate rituals as they share the space with a shifting cast of hundreds of people, each with their own stories.

On one veranda a family is remembering a little girl called Gunumaya, or Chatty, who loved to ride across the hills on her father's horse and grew up to memorize the *Bhagavad Gita*. Her name was Bhargavi Devi Bhetwal and she died at 83, felled by high blood pressure, diabetes and Parkinson's Disease, but that's not how they want to remember her. Somehow she was always that young girl with the curious mind, even when she

was old and frail.

Around one of the sacred fires in the courtyard another family shared stories of a miracle. "She prayed every day at the temple to the Goddess and asked Her to teach her to read," recalls Pratibha Subedi of Halifax, Canada, as she watched the final rites for her grandmother, Devaka Poudel. "Then one day, she could read."

Literacy was rare in Nepal at that time, since schools were almost non-existent—and women were almost never literate, no matter their family status. "She didn't even go to Class One," notes another grandchild, veterinarian Apar Poudel. "It just came to her after she prayed. So she was a deep believer. She could even read Sanskrit. She had so many religious books. All her friends would come and listen to her read."

### Tradition Followed & Questioned

There was no question the family would follow all the customs for their devout elder, such as the ritual feeding of her soul with a *pinda* (rice ball) for 10 days, one day for each month in the womb, with her children repaying her for the gift of life by nourishing her symbolically as she formed a new body for her next phase of existence.

They also practiced a series of austerities, including not eating salt for 13 days. Tandan, the scholar and member secretary of the Pashupati Area Development Trust, notes that this custom's deep roots in Nepal may relate to the historical status of salt as a precious commodity transported from the sea or

Tibetan plateau. Refraining from it, he says, allowed people to distribute it to others.

Salt is seen as stimulating to the *jnanendriyas* (the sensory organs) and *karmendriyas* (the working faculties), and shunning it for a period helps the mourner to focus on the present, he says. Mourners also abstain from oil and spices. To give up the pleasures and necessities that are normally taken for granted—from flavorful food to the comfort of your own bed—is also a way to express the importance of parents, who, after all, give people a life they also take for granted.

Typically, the mourners who sleep at the Kriyaputri Bhawan are the sons, daughters and daughters-in-law of the deceased, who engage in the strictest austerities and greatest number of rituals. Others may stay to offer support or can mourn at home for the period of time dictated by kinship and custom. Practices across the Hindu world follow a similar pattern, but differ in detail based on relationship, stage of life, caste and gender, as well as community and regional customs. Mourning has adapted in large and small ways over the centuries, and shortened versions have also evolved. The tradition, though, has its critics. In Nepal, several political leaders in recent years chose not to do *kriya* for their parents, sparking both disapproval and a discussion about the relevance of strict old customs.

One challenge, of course, can be the cost. A full period of mourning, with all the rituals and expense of feeding a steady stream of mourners for days, can cost over \$1,500. Rooms at the Kriyaputri Bhawan are inex-



pensive; a basic room costs 60 Nepali rupees a night (about 60 cents) and sleeps many people, while a room with an attached bath costs 250 rupees a night (about \$250). Still, the costs of a 13-day mourning period add up, as funerals do in other cultures. The average cost of a typical American funeral is about \$10,000. It's hard to make a comparison, given the differences between salaries, cost of living, and the fact that non-Hindu funerals in the West are one-day affairs without a mourning period; but in both parts of the world, the activities surrounding a funeral can easily exceed several months' salary. And it's undeniable that the austerities can be tough.

What do the mourners at the Kriyaputri Bhawan think? "Rituals ought to be done, but according to your own choice and circumstances," says Jivan Poudel, a retired bureaucrat. "It seems that some customs, like not eating salt, might even be harmful to the body."

Tandan, of the Pashupati Area Development Trust, supports the notion of thoughtful adaptation. "Hinduism is a river rather than a pond," he says. If it was a pond, it could have become stagnant and dried up ages ago. But a river changes its course over time, and develops tributaries and branches. "A river is flexible. It takes its course based on the needs it encounters. That's why Hinduism has survived."

Still, people tend to agree that the heart of the custom is important to preserve. "It gives respect to the person who died, and traditions always have a logical basis," says Apar Poudel. "I think this one exists so there won't be any frustration or depression afterwards and we'll

feel at peace." He followed all of the rituals for his grandmother, including salt abstinence, and felt it was a purifying process that initially caused him to feel lethargic—almost as if his body was in tune with the sadness of his grandmother's death—but left him with a feeling of balance and renewal.

### The Story Continues

Last rites may seem like the end of a person's story, but the end of one story is the start of another. Late at night in the austere room where Komal went into mourning with siblings after flying in from Finland, the conversation kept cycling back to their parents and the best way to honor their legacy.

Komal and her siblings—Jalpa Bhusal, Pavitra Gaire and Indramani Chundali—recalled their mother's heartfelt support for an education she never received. They recalled their late father, known in the village as Kancha Ved, or young chanter of the Vedas, who inspired change for miles around when he sent all of his daughters to school. As they talked and prayed together, they vowed to carry on their parents' devotion to education with a scholarship in their names at the old village school. Goma and Tikaram Chundali are gone, but their time on Earth will be remembered by bringing a better future to others.

Each day at the Kriyaputri Bhawan, itself a memorial to a beloved mother, people perform a final act of devotion to a loved one whose story seems finished, and then discover it's not the end of the story after all. In the shadow of Pashupatinath, the cycle of life carries on. 🍽️

**Faith empowers the process:** (left) A new bed arrayed with gifts that recall the deceased will be offered to others on her behalf; (above) two of the deceased's sons sit, contented, after the *puja* conducted on the last day of mourning



Sally Acharya is an American writer living in Kathmandu. She has worked as a news and feature reporter for Gannett, as staff writer for American University in Washington, DC, and has been published in the *Washington Post*, *USA Today* and other publications in Nepal and the US. She speaks Nepali and enjoys being part of a Nepali family.



# From Spirit to Ancestor

## An account of Nepal's ritual mourning requirements

BY SALLY ACHARYA, NEPAL

IN THE HINDU COSMOLOGY, THE path to the afterlife is an epic journey that is influenced by the person's actions during life, but is also assisted by relatives in the days after the soul's departure.

This belief, like others, varies across the vast Hindu world and can be understood on many levels. The soul's journey across the ghost-riddled plains and dangerous rivers of the Pretaloka (realm of the spirits) until it joins the ancestors in the Pitriloka (realm of the ancestors) can be seen as a literal voyage through alternate realms, as a symbolic envisioning of the process of death and rebirth, or as elements of both. Rites, like beliefs, also vary by family background, regional culture, community and devotional preference.

For the Nepalis who stay near Pashupatinath to perform the duties to the dead known as *antyeshti kriya* or *antim samskara*, the 13-day period of deep mourning involves specific actions that are viewed as a final act of assistance the living can give to departed family members.

The performance of *kriya* is one of the crucial *samskaras*, or rites of passage, that mark the journey of a Hindu through life and engage not just the recipient but the whole family. Traditions vary, but there are often said to be 16 rites of passage. The first are conducted before birth; the last involves a series of rituals after the soul has left the body to help it complete its transformation from a *preta*, or disconnected spirit, into a *pitri*, or honored ancestor.

In the end, whether or not a soul finds liberation depends on the person's life, their previous lives and their karma, says Govinda Tandan, member secretary of the Pashupati Area Development Trust and a scholar of history and culture. It's often feared that a soul could be doomed to a purgatorial limbo as a *bhuta*, often translated as *ghost*, if a family fails to conduct the final rites. But in Tandan's view, rituals or the lack of them can't guarantee liberation or sentence a soul to the limbo of ghosts. "It's not that easy," he says. On a spiritual level, the deceased is being helped to a positive place in the next stage of existence by the prayers and gratitude of kin.



ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY

The series of rituals ease the transition for survivors and symbolize the powerful connection between individuals and families, the living and the dead, the past and the present.

What are some of the ritual requirements, and what do they mean? Lila Prasad Acharya has worked as a priest at the Kriyaputri Bhawan since 2005, when he returned to Nepal after years of studying and practicing in India. Almost every day he leads families through the rituals and engages in conversation about their meaning. Here is how some of the components can be understood.

**Ritual Purity:** All the mourners wear white unsewn cloth to ensure their purity; white is used because it symbolizes peace and shows openly whether it's clean or unclean. Mourners sit on wool blankets because wool has a striking natural feature; water will run off it, a symbolic indication of incorruptibility. Rice straw is used in mattresses

and sandals because mourning is a time to use only simple products from nature that traditionally were easily available and easily disposed of. Hair is shaved to keep it from dropping into any of the foods or ritual substances and contaminating it, since all of the offerings must be pure.

Mourners are considered impure, which does not mean "bad" but rather a state of vulnerability and distress. It's an unsettled period when the spirit of the deceased is still attached in a subtle sense to the living, and neither the living nor the dead has quite moved on. Working to purify the body aids in purifying and focusing the mind.

A person who is ritually impure also is not in the right condition to make divine offerings, so purification and prayer bring them to a state where they'll be able to do that again. It should be noted that mourners at the Kriyaputri Bhawan are near Pashupatinath tem-



**A fond farewell:** (left) In the everyday world, Devaka Poudel's children—Judge Damaru Dev, teacher Krishna Dev, bureaucrat Bishnu Dev and Doctor Jayadevi Subedi—are very much of the 21st century. But mourning united them in their love and grief for their mother and their devotion to the age-old traditions of Hindu life. (right) Touching a calf calls symbolically on Lakshmi to aid the soul in its journey into the next plane of existence.

cow, and specifically its rope-like tail, is a way of invoking safe passage with the guidance of all that the cow symbolizes, including the Goddess Lakshmi and spiritual purity. Conceptually, the notion of a difficult journey full of obstacles that can only be overcome with purity and devotion is symbolic of all the challenges that must be met to find liberation.

**Charitable Gifts:** As the mourners complete the process, gifts (*daan* or *daanam*) are given in the name of the deceased to express their life and personality. If it is a woman, the gifts might include devotional pictures and the types of saris and bangles she liked. A new bed is also given, in part as a wish that the deceased will sleep well in their next life and as an act of generosity to others; piled on the gift bed (*shaiya daan*) will typically be gifts of pots, pans and other useful everyday objects. As with other donations in Hinduism, including payments to a Brahmin for puja, a family that can't afford it can simply give a small symbolic amount of cash or some flowers.

The recipient varies according to tradition and caste. In Nepal, a Chhetri (Kshatriya) family gives the gifts to the Brahmin conducting the ceremony—this is often the family *purohit* (priest)—while a Brahmin family gives the gifts to a family member with whom the deceased had a respect relationship, such as a son-in-law or the children of one's sister. It's believed that souls will feel happy to be remembered fondly whenever the objects are used and to know that their connection with the living will continue even though they've passed from the Earth.

After the gifts are given, the soul can join the ancestors contentedly and pass to the next stage of existence, and mourners can share a delicious meal and return to their ordinary lives. The strictest may follow an extended mourning taboo of not eating outside the home for a year and will honor the deceased on death anniversaries, but the time has come for everyone, both the living and the dead, to continue on their journeys.

ple—on connected ground (the area is locally referred to as Pashupati) but not inside the temple complex, where mourning would not be conducted. Hindus often try to stay near sacred sites during mourning, but funerals and mourning don't occur inside temples.

**Sleeping:** The bereaved don't stay in their usual beds for mourning but must set aside a separate space, even if they mourn at home. They sleep on the floor in the same position that the body is cremated, with the head to the north and feet to the south. A cotton string is placed atop the bed to mark off the sleeping area as a space where no negative spirits can enter.

**Daily Offerings:** Each day, a complex series of offerings needs to be given in a prescribed manner. The order, number and direction in which offerings are placed is determined by tradition, but there is always an underlying meaning.

**Pinda:** Balls of specially prepared rice are placed on leaf plates as gifts, but what they mean each day is different. Traditionally the offerings began as the body was carried from its deathbed, with pinda placed on the bed, at the gateway of the home, on the road and at the funeral grounds to distract any ghosts or impure spirits as the soul goes on its way. It can also be understood as pleasing to the Deities.

Other pinda are offered daily. One the first day of mourning, the group of pinda includes one divided into four pieces. Two pieces are allocated to the helpers of Yama, lord of the dead, who act as psychopomps and guide the soul on its way; the others are reserved to form and nourish the soul's new body. From then on, each day with its offering of pinda represents a month the body spends in the

womb and corresponds with the formation of a part of the body.

**Final Rituals:** The extended ceremony that marks both the return of the mourners to ordinary life and the establishment of the deceased among the ancestors is performed on either the 13th day or, if that day would fall on a ritually inappropriate Wednesday or a Sunday, on the 12th day.

As part of the ceremony, the names of ancestors are invoked. Ideally, this includes the names of at least three generations of fathers, but the names of Deities are also invoked to stand in for the ancestors whose names have vanished from memory, far back in time.

The smoke from the sacred fire—not just from this ceremony, but any puja—is also said to free unknown *preta* whose family may not have conducted the appropriate rites, or who otherwise have had the misfortune to remain in limbo through an unhealthy attachment to this plane of existence. In this sense, performing any type of traditional rites will serve not only the immediate ritual purpose, but also benefit others less fortunate.

**Presence of a Cow:** A cow is always present on the last day. Its tail is grasped while auspicious water is poured on the tail and the mourners' hands as the Brahmin recites prayers, and then its tail is handed to the Brahmin as a *godaan*, or offering of a cow. Historically, cows were donated to the Brahmin who conducted the ceremony; in today's world, mourners make a monetary donation and the offering of a cow is symbolic.

Touching a cow is also an offer of assistance to the deceased. There are said to be 16 rivers to cross and 16 plains before the spirit can reach the realm of the ancestors. Touching a





## EDUCATION

# Taking Youth Conventions to the Next Level

While many Hindu youth are getting lost in a world of information and secular thinking, BAPS continues to find ways to reach the next generation

IN THE WEST, SUMMER SCHOOL BREAKS and vacations from work are normally about pool time, theme parks, vacations, and spending more time with friends and family. But for members of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, there are also opportunities for spiritual enrichment through youth gatherings. These are normally held at the regional level, but in July 2013 the youth planned and executed the BAPS Swaminarayan North American Youth Convention in Atlanta, Georgia, which brought 8,000-plus participants and volunteers from all over the continent and beyond. It was the first of its kind in the history of Hindus in North America. The event comprised three conventions targeting different age groups. After a July 4 opening, for three days 3,320 high school and college students gathered, followed by three days for 2,950 grade school children, ending with three days for 1,900 young professionals and families.

The convention immersed youth in the challenge of understanding and implementing Ekantik Dharma—a lifestyle based on the

four pillars—Gnan (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion), Vairagya (detachment) and Dharma (righteousness). These are core values from Hindu scripture further elaborated upon by Bhagwan Swaminarayan over 200 years ago. The convention provided a platform for youth to discuss the relentless daily pressures and constant pulls in various directions that they face, and to integrate practical, spiritual methods to triumph amidst these struggles. The grand opening included cultural performances by all groups—the “Ekantik Melo.” Participants from various regions demonstrated their talent in singing, dancing, acting, and much more, illustrating how to follow Ekantik Dharma.

Yogini Patel from Atlanta commented, “I didn’t expect it to be so relatable. That’s one of the biggest differences that I have seen in this convention. The characters in these dramas—I relate to their lives; their life is my life and their thoughts are my thoughts.” During each following three-day period, age-appropriate group activities, games, discussions and cultural programs gave the attendees fun

and engaging ways to learn more about the four pillars of knowledge, devotion, detachment and righteousness.

Swamis of BAPS from around the world shared their knowledge on holding to Hindu-centric values while maintaining a balanced life. Sadguru Pujya Mahant Keshavjivandas Swami, the keynote speaker of each convention, explained that the path to Ekantik Dharma is a lifelong journey. Though derived from ancient scripture, the ideals of Ekantik Dharma are still applicable today. Knowledge is more than facts and information. Wisdom lies in differentiating the merely interesting from what is needed for progress. Dharma governs our conduct and how we uphold our duties and responsibilities. It applies not only to spiritual progress, but also helps ensure success in academics and professional careers. Pujya Anandswarupdas Swami, head of Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar, India, explained: “Ekantik Dharma is not just something to be talked about; it is something to be lived. To live it, the Satpuruṣh (guru) should be the center point of our

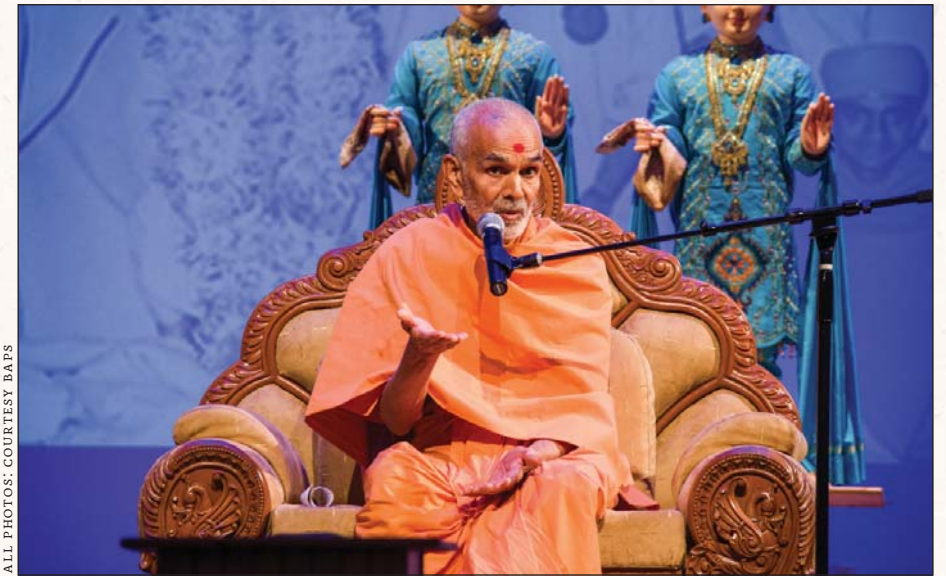


**Eight thousand youth for dharma:** (clockwise from opposite page) the main convention hall surrounded by video screens, including live feeds from India; a young participant makes notes; keynote speaker, Sadguru Pujya Mahant Keshavjivandas Swami; delegates performing abhishek for Bhagwan Swaminarayan

lives, nothing else. That is the only way to be Ekantik.”

This is the sixteenth such convention held by BAPS since 1984. The 2013 event was one of the biggest. Jiger Amin, the leader among group leaders, says, “The initial brainstorming for this convention started in 2010 with a few individuals from various parts of North America. Over the next two years (2010–2012) they spent portions of their school break/work vacation to develop the program. In February 2013, two hundred volunteers converged in Atlanta for a ‘go-getters meeting’ to finalize all the logistics for the convention months in advance.”

Preparing for these events is a powerful model for engaging youth, not only to come as attendees, but to participate years in advance as volunteers and players in the programs. The scope of engagement was massive and multi-tiered. Jiger explains, “We did advance surveys to select 263 different bal/balika (children’s) groups from across the continent with approximately eight people in each group. There were 240 different groups for the high school and college convention. A total of 436 group leaders for the bal/balika and teen conventions were trained at regional seminars, including a



small group of ten from Australia/New Zealand. A core group of 350 young adult team members from across the country played a vital role in the planning and execution of this event. These volunteers have to balance school and work with their free-time volunteer work. Approximately 614 participants were involved in the actual stage rehearsals and presentations. There were approximately 110 different leaders when counting all the departments. Major departments included medical, kitchen, transportation, accommodations, housekeeping, logistics, programming, flow, temple visits and various other departments.”

Each three-day convention was intended to not only strengthen spirituality, but also to leave the attendees with a stronger sense of balance in their lives. Kishori (high-school/college-age level) Dhawal Tank of Toronto, Canada, said, “I think the convention gives

delegates a new perspective on how to live a life which is true to your roots, true to your culture and heritage. People often think that there is a clash of civilizations, clash of cultures. I think what this entire program is about is to show that there is no clash. The two lifestyles can coexist. You can stay true to your roots and there is no conflict—you can succeed and you can be happy.” Through a live video feed, His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, spiritual leader of BAPS, gave blessings from India to reinforce the message of becoming an Ekantik Dharma devotee, encouraging youth to understand and embrace their roots, helping them preserve their identities and remain grounded in their faith and culture.

See: [bit.ly/baps-youth-2013](http://bit.ly/baps-youth-2013)  
Video: [bit.ly/baps-youth-video](http://bit.ly/baps-youth-video)





YOUTH

# Students Jump Ahead

For college students and young professionals, the Hindu Students Association has become a fount of religious learning, life-long connections and fun

By HARI VENKATACHALAM,  
TAMPA, FLORIDA

**T**HERE WAS A TANGIBLE ELECTRICITY within the room as I walked in. At first glance, the meeting seemed an ordinary congregation of college students in business casual attire, appearances crisp and professional, marred only slightly by the varying levels of fatigue in their eyes from their trip to Austin.

This was the Dharma Initiative: a retreat for young professionals of the Hindu Students Association (HSA) that took place September 20-22, 2013. Its attendees are the face of the young, rapidly growing Hindu American community. Crafting a brand of Hinduism that is true to its roots, yet essentially American is a task that they all accept, and a goal that the Hindu Students Association aspires to achieve.

## Hinduism in the US

The Pew Research center released an article in December, 2012, entitled "The Global Religious Landscape," tracking adherents of various faiths across the world. The report noted a key fact about the distribution of Hindus:

"Hinduism is the most geographically concentrated of the eight religious groups analyzed...." Indeed, 97 percent of Hindus live in three countries where they form the majority: Nepal, India and Mauritius. This fact plays greatly into the social experience of Hindus; the vast majority are accustomed to a religious environment wherein individuals are supported and strengthened by a strong surrounding community.

Naturally, the experience of two million Hindus in the US spread across 3.7 million square miles differs greatly. The lack of a large Hindu community deprives many of the social elements of their faith, including the celebration of large festivals and the resources provided by local temples.

## Bridging the Gaps

Ramya Ravi, National President of HSA and an MBA candidate at the McCombs School of Business at UT Austin, who has lived in India and the US, explained the key differences. "In India, you are less aware of people of religions other than Hinduism. Here in the US, I found myself being asked questions about my faith. When I turned to my

parents and my grandparents for explanations about certain customs, they gave the usual response: 'That's what we've always done.' I found that I had to search for proper answers from texts. The whole process was scientific, involving having a question and searching for a possible answer."

Many Hindus have to deal with incorrect notions found in the greater American mind. Ramya described a situation in which she had been asked to draw a Hindu temple. In her drawing, she included a swastika, a Hindu symbol of good fortune. The drawing incited fear, anger and confusion in her classmates. Ravi was surprised by these reactions. "It does not make sense to have anger towards a symbol without recognizing the meaning behind it," Ravi insisted. This sentiment is what prompted HSA to sponsor a Swastika Awareness workshop at Texas A&M.

Bridges need to be built within the Hindu community as well. Although temples are sprouting up in cities across the country and many colleges offer coursework about our faith, the growing gap between those who immigrated and those who were born here is a hindrance to the stability of the faith. "Look



**Together:** (clockwise from left) At an annual Gateway Camp, students leap into the air for an inspired, unique group photo; playing an ice-breaking game demonstrating the interconnectedness of all; making offerings into the havan together

at the older generation of Hindu immigrants," offered Ramya. "They're spending money to build temples to preserve the culture and the faith. They are organizing festivals, pujas and cultural events. But where are the younger generations? We are not there."

As the Hindu faith grows in the US, Ramya, and others like her will need to bring together these two factions of Hindu Americans. "It rests upon our shoulders to create that voice and to build that network."

## Art and Devotion

Sonny Mehta, a member of HSA's board of directors and a hospital and healthcare strategy consultant, described his experiences as a Hindu transitioning to life in the US. Music helped him stay connected to his faith after being uprooted from India. "My musical background goes all the way back to when I was in India singing bhajans and ghazals. When my family moved here, it was the first thing we did. We went to Sai Baba bhajans and got heavily involved."

The use of religious music including bhajans is central to the Hindu experience all around the world. "Often we think that we don't know how to do something as well as someone else. However, with their simplicity, bhajans take that pressure away and bring each of us closer to God," notes Sonny.

Although bhajan groups are common in urban areas in the US, they may be inaccessible for many Hindu Americans living in rural and suburban communities. This prompted Mehta to lead the HSA's Mantra Project. The project takes traditional Hindu mantras and slokas, sets them to music and makes them accessible from anywhere via the Internet. "Temples are a place that you have to go to at a certain time. By the sheer fact that you have to attend, it makes it hard for everyone to participate. We make this our strength." Accessing religious music from anywhere at any time helps connect Hindus across the country.

Mehta envisions people using online platforms to create music together from anywhere. His endless list of possibilities includes bhajan karaoke tracks and broadcasting religious music over the radio and other media channels during holiday seasons. "The Mantra Project is only step one," Mehta commented. "Young Hindus need to create forms of artistic expression with a true heart and with goodness. It will be welcomed by many people, even people who may not consider themselves artists."



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY HINDU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

## Evolving and Strengthening

Saumya Saran is focused on helping Hinduism make an impact in the fast-paced, technology-driven digital age. Saran, the National Secretary for HSA, and a graduate student in robotics and autonomous vehicles at the University of Michigan, heads the project that creates animated movies for YouTube to explain various Hindu concepts. "College students," Saran laughed, "don't really have the patience to listen to lectures from gurus that are 15 minutes or longer. That is the main reason we keep the presentations under five minutes. The animation draws the interest of the viewer."

Upon viewing the "What Is Yoga?" animation, I immediately saw its effectiveness: short but thorough. With over 60,000 views, the video has drawn attention from all over the world. "A professor as far as the UK," Saran confessed, "emailed asking permission to show the presentation as part of his course to help his students understand the concept of yoga on a wider scale."

When I asked Saran about the importance

of these videos, he explained that they revitalize the spiritual meaning behind concepts that have been lost to the general American population. "Yoga is a perfect example. Here in the West, it has come to mean exercise. When you think of yoga as just exercise, you lose the spiritual meaning, culture and philosophy."

Sagar Vira, HSA's CTO and a finance major at Emory University, chips in by providing short links of the monthly newsletter he edits for the organization that can be Tweeted, Facebooked and texted. The universal presence of tablets and smartphones throughout the room of young professionals, coupled with the YouTube and Mantra projects, told me that a space for Hinduism on the Internet will be the glue that binds Hindu Americans together.

## Faith in Service

While worship can surely help enrich a devotee's experience, many also turn their daily experiences and interactions outside of that context into acts of devotion. Roshni Patel, an



executive branch president and a biochemistry student at the University of Arkansas, described the significance of expressing her faith through social service. Throughout her high school years, she committed herself to seva, the Hindu concept of selfless service. Her offerings ranged from volunteering at the hospital to picking up trash in parks to helping clean backyards for neighbors.

Recently Roshni seized the opportunity to get her HSA branch involved in a school-wide "Make a Difference Day," in which they did a home makeover for a disabled individual in the community. She also organized a bone marrow drive, focusing on donors from the South Asian community. "Personally," She comments, "Seva is a part of life. That's

how I was raised. Doing seva is a way of life and part of one's dharma. We receive a lot every day, and we take that for granted. Giving back helps us grow spiritually."

#### Different, Not Worse

While the experience of growing up as a member of a minority faith may have some difficulties, many of the youth at Dharma Initiative were keen on reminding me that there are some benefits to the experience as well. Within Hinduism there is already a diversity of traditions and sects that have been shaped by the culture of the region they were practiced in and which exist independently of one another.

Ruchita Naik, vice-president for the HSA

and undergraduate in hospitality management at the University of Houston, discussed her experience growing up. "My family practices Shaivism," she explained. "I learned from my parents about what we followed. I didn't know specifically what I was doing though; I was just going to events such as Garba and Janmashtami. Being a part of HSA made me realize that I don't know a lot about my religion. It filled that void."

Similarly, Shivang Shah, a student at UT Austin, described previously understanding only a portion of the larger Hindu faith. "We are Pushti Marg and worship Gokul Nathji. It is a small community in my city, and we all are very familiar with each other. We go to the same functions and have classes on Sundays. After I joined HSA, I participated in many discussions and learned so much more about Hinduism that I hadn't known before."

Both Shivang and Ruchita explained how much they appreciated being introduced to the different strains of Hinduism. Ruchita helps each year to organize HSA's Gateway, a weekend retreat for students and young professionals, including young people from all across the US from different linguistic, religious and ethnic backgrounds. "Gateway provides a way to see what we can all bring to the table," Ruchita insisted. "It's a mixture of everything. It changes depending on who comes, who speaks and who organizes it. We invite professional speakers, for example, Jason Tengco from the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, to help attendees develop professional skills and to spread awareness of current political and socio-economic issues. At the same time, we invite knowledgeable Hindu priests and experts to explain traditions and answer spiritual questions that we may have."

Similarly, Shivang helps organize his HSA branch's Hinduism Awareness Week. "The simple thing," he reiterates, "is that we all come from different backgrounds. When you go to temple or mandir, there is a similar way of practicing among similar people. However, at events such as these, you have people from different parts of the US, the world, and from different walks of life." The kaleidoscope of traditions that forms the American identity has always perpetuated the idea of unity through diversity. Young Hindus are taking a page from this book to clarify and strengthen their faith within the American context.

**Activities:** (clockwise from left) 2014 Holi celebration at UT Austin; presenting one of our culture's elaborate and kinetic dances at a university cultural event; Mrs. Obama graces a Diwali event at the White House; performing individual archana at a Diwali event



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#### Fighting Discrimination

Mrinalini Vijalapuram, an international relations and global studies major at UT Austin, brought up one of the biggest challenges faced by the Hindu minority: discrimination. In the post-9/11 era especially, the news seems to be overflowing with stories of violence against minority communities. "Minorities are always targeted for discrimination and bullied in school. I can vouch for this," Mrinalini regretted. "I would be picked on during school. But kids today are constantly connected through the Internet and phones. Some can be driven to suicide. There is no reason for this to be happening."

Mrinalini represented the HSA at "Dharmic Seva: Transforming Our Self, Our Community, Our Country," a conference at the White House focused on bringing awareness to Hindu faiths and developing dialogue between Hindu and other religious communities. A presentation about violence and harassment faced by Hindu students in the DC area deeply impacted her. "I think the kids who led that presentation have huge hearts and a lot of bravery to be able to stand up and speak on behalf of kids who are bullied because of their religion and race."

I asked Mrinalini how she feels organizations such as HSA can end bullying. "Education is the best way to end bullying and any acts arising from ignorance."

#### A Glimpse of Things to Come

As I sat absorbing all the ideas, experiences and projects that these delegates had presented, I was startled by how young my fellow attendees were. They are only beginning their paths of leadership, but have already taken the reins and are guiding the development of the Hindu faith in the US. The assuredness I feel for my faith in this country is rooted in the ingenuity and creativity of the attendees and the support that HSA provides. No one need worry about the future of the Hindu faith as a minority religion here.

Shaping the Hindu faith in the US is a challenging endeavor that these young adults have boldly undertaken. I can only assume that the confidence to engage this kind of a task must come from the same spirit that inspired First Lady Michelle Obama's words at the Diwali celebration at the White House last year: "We want to honor and embrace all of the many cultures and faith traditions that make us who we are as Americans." Away from the strongholds of Hinduism throughout the world, these youth are drawing from their identities as Hindus and as Americans to shape the future of their faith and their lives within this country. This conference was only a glimpse of the many great things to come.

Visit [www.hindustudentsassociation.org](http://www.hindustudentsassociation.org)





# Hindu Heritage Endowment

## THREE DISTINCT TYPES OF FUND RAISING:

### ANNUAL GIFTS, MAJOR GIFTS AND PLANNED GIFTS

Every now and then we are asked by a temple in the USA that is newly formed or just a few years old whether it should start an endowment fund at this time or wait. The concern is that raising funds for an endowment will compete with what are viewed as the more pressing needs of paying down a major loan or funding the next phase of temple construction. These are reasonable concerns but professional fundraisers tell us that this is not an issue if the various fund raising programs are properly presented and administered. Their explanation is that there are three distinct types of fund raising and donors utilize different parts of their wealth for each.

- **Annual gifts**, such as the year-end appeal for general support, are made from disposable income.
- **Major gifts**, such as for temple construction, are funded from savings or other assets such as appreciated stock or real estate.
- **Planned gifts**, such as for an endowment fund, which usually take place in the future, are part of the donor's estate plan and utilize lifetime accumulated assets of all types.

To check on this concept, planned giving professionals have done research and found that more than 70 percent of people who have already made planned gifts also continue to make annual gifts to the organizations they've named in their estate plans.

A compelling reason for a new temple to start an endowment fund as early as possible is that more of the founding core group of donors is still living in the area and participating in the temple. This group is the natural support for the temple's endowment fund. In the history of the construction of Hindu temples, some of them have simultaneously been endowed either by a king or a Hindu community with gifts of land for shops or for agriculture. They wanted to make sure what they built was abundantly sustained in perpetuity.

The concept of making charitable gifts in your estate plan to your favorite charities is commonly referred to as "Leaving a legacy." For example, if you are donating \$5,000 a year to a Hindu temple, a gift to their endowment of \$125,000 would continue to provide that \$5,000 a year far into the future (assumes a grant of 4%). Potential donors may raise the objection, "I have children and relatives. Shouldn't I leave my entire estate to them?" This is perhaps the number one cause for reluctance when making a bequest. However, part of making a charitable bequest is demonstrating your values and beliefs to your family, reinforcing what you have done during life.

Making a planned gift to an endowment should not be done as an independent action. It should be part of a comprehensive estate plan. Professional advisors need to be involved to help the donor understand the various ways to give as well as decide the question of what to give—which addresses the complex realm of the "tax consequences" involved in giving different types of assets. Learn more about estate planning and planned giving at [www.hheonline.org](http://www.hheonline.org).



The Iraivan Hindu Temple in Hawaii is a model of successful implementation of annual, major and planned gifts. It is the largest HHE endowment.



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## APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

<b>Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment</b> Anonymous <sup>US\$</sup> 328.24 Dheeraj Handa 101.00 Roshan Harilela 375.00 Gayatri Rajan 75.00 Chamundi Sabanathan 75.00 Other Donations 125,344.20 Total 126,298.44	<b>Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam</b> Anonymus 308.00 Ananthakumar Renganathan 300.00 Total 608.00	Avani Patel 50.00 Mrunal Patel 1,008.00 Anonymous 46.00 Alex Ruberto 45.00 Chamundi Sabanathan 216.00 Aran Sambandar 162.00 Hitesvara Saravan 108.00 Ganga Sivanathan 108.00 Anba Dayananden Valayten 12.71 Vayudeva Varadan 63.00 Michael Wasykiw 864.00 Total 10,213.72	<b>Yogaswami Hindu Boys' Home Fund</b> Anonymous 351.00
<b>Iraivan Temple Endowment</b> Canadians Sharing Locally and Globally 899.34 Frank Burkhardt 30.00 Dheeraj Handa 202.00 Victoria Lynne Johnson 11.00 Kalpana & Muralikumar 51.00 Anonymous 1,001.00 Alex Ruberto 108.00 Ganga Sivanathan 216.00 Easwaran & Beena Variyam 101.00 Other Donations 42,735.77 Total 45,355.11	<b>Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund</b> Anonymous 324.00	<b>Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund</b> Arumugam Alvappillai 90.00 Anonymous 1,900.00 Raj & Damayanthi Bharathan 150.00 Manny Yogarajah 150.00 Total 2,290.00	<b>Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment</b> Anonymous 108.00 Chellappa Deva 25.00 Total 133.00
<b>Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment</b> Mano Navaratnarajah 75.00	<b>Hinduism Today Production Fund</b> Ron & Jennifer Burke 150.00 P.C. Ghosh 30.00 Hiranya Gowda 93.00 Bhagawandas P. Lathi 5,000.00 Raghunath P. Lathi 21,000.00 Anonymous 1,033.06 Subramaniam Pennathur 50.01 Sakuntalai Periasamy 33.87 Gayatri Rajan 75.00 Asan Tejwani 504.00 Total 27,968.94	<b>Udayan Care Endowment Fund</b> Anonymous 25.00	<b>India Hindu Tribals Endowment</b> Anonymous 25.00 Michael R. Eisen 50.00 Total 75.00
<b>Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund</b> Anonymous 354.90 Thirujnam Amasalon 19.57 Anil Ananda Badhwar 18.00 Hemakhesha Naatha Batumallah 7.00 Mekaladeva Batumallah 7.00 Victoria Lynne Johnson 11.00 Juhivaasana Koothan 9.79 Anil Kumar 9.00 Punithavathi Kuppusamy 30.00 Bhadresh & Anjani Mehta 51.00 Udayadeva Moorghen 3.23 Jogendra Moorroogen 4.89 Vidyadevi Moorroogen 4.89 Pann Murugaiyan 50.00 Vinod Nair 15.08 Toshadevi Nataraj 60.00 Padmini Pareatumbbee 6.45 Subramaniam Pennathur 49.98 Hemavalli Sivalingam 0.93 Tejasinha Sivalingam 21.25 Total 733.96	<b>Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund</b> Roshan Harilela 375.00 Anonymous 501.00 Alex Ruberto 75.00 Chamundi Sabanathan 75.00 Rodney & Ilene Standen 30.00 Matthew Wiczork 33.00 Total 1,089.00	<b>Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired</b> Anonymous 25.00 Alex Ruberto 60.00 Total 85.00	<b>Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund</b> Anonymous 53.70 Vayudeva Varadan 54.00 Total 107.70
<b>Hindu Education Endowment</b> Hasu N. & Hansa H. Patel 100.00	<b>The Kautilya Endowment</b> Anonymous 125.00	<b>Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment</b> Shyama! Chandra Debnath 150.00	<b>Ramanathaswamy Temple Cleaning Fund</b> Danyse Crotti 150.00 Hiranya Gowda 99.00 Kulagan Moonesawmy 19.57 Toshadevi Nataraj 60.00 Ganga Sivanathan 54.00 Total 382.57
<b>Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund</b> Chan Basho 499.00 Darlene Bolesny 140.00 Ravi Chandrasekhara 499.00 Rina Dutta 499.00 So Cal Univ. Health Sciences 499.00 Kumara Hunter 200.00 Souda Koothan 195.71 Praveen Kumar 66.00 Sivakavinian Moonesawmy 75.00 Bhaveshan Moorghen 6.46 Shanda Kumaran Moorghen 6.46 Udayadeva Moorghen 3.23 Ramanlal Patel 499.00 Anjeeni Devi Peruman 65.59 Kirtideva Peruman 29.36 Niroshnee Peruman 34.25 Wayne Reynolds 200.00 Sai Singh 120.00 Logavalli Sinsamy 23.36 Potriyan Sivanathan 6.12 V & Mangala Venkatesh 499.00 Total 4,165.54	<b>Hindu Press International Endowment Fund</b> Hiranya Gowda 63.00	<b>Murugan Temple Valpanam Festival Fund</b> Michael R. Eisen 25.00 Pathmini Saravanapavan 150.00 Total 175.00	<b>Hindu American Foundation Endowment</b> Michael R. Eisen 25.00 Rajendra Giri 110.00 Anonymous 1,001.00 Total 1,136.00
<b>Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund</b> Anonymous 157.06 Mano Navaratnarajah 225.00 Gassa Patten 1,350.00 Total 1,732.06	<b>Saiva Agamas Trust</b> Ganga Sivanathan 108.00	<b>Manitha Neyam Trust Fund</b> Anonymous 100.00 Bala Sivaceyon 60.00 Nutananya Sivaceyon 30.00 Total 190.00	<b>Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment</b> Microsoft Matching Gifts Program 125.00 Dinanatha Borzunov 50.00 Anonymous 83.00 Elena Dmitrichenko 33.00 Dheeraj Handa 21.00 Kishore Krishna 125.00 Kalpana & Muralikumar 51.00 Krishnamurthi 33.00 Natraj Narayanswami 33.00 Toshadevi Nataraj 30.00 Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan 57.00 Arunasalam Vathavooran 25.00 Total 633.00
<b>Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment</b> Anil Ananda Badhwar 18.00 Anil Kumar 9.00 Total 27.00	<b>Positive Discipline Endowment</b> Aetna Foundation Inc 59.40 Total 59.40	<b>Taos Hanuman Fund</b> David Bohn 10.00	<b>Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage</b> Meera Krishnan 25.00
<b>Positive Discipline Endowment</b> Aetna Foundation Inc 59.40 Total 59.40	<b>Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund</b> Shyamadeva Dandapani 33.00	<b>Karnataka Temple Development Fund</b> Hiranya Gowda 600.00 Ramesh & Arundati Gowda 80.00 Total 680.00	<b>Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund</b> Anil Ananda Badhwar 18.00 Arvind Chandrakantan 1,001.00 Sanjay Dahya 195.29 Anil Kumar 9.00 Total 1,223.29
<b>Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund</b> Anonymous 100.00	<b>Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund</b> Hansmukh & Pratima Patel 500.00	<b>Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment</b> Anonymous 100.00 Canaganayagam Kugendra 40.00 Total 140.00	<b>Murugamoorthi Thirukkivil Endowment</b> Ganga Sivanathan 54.00
<b>Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund</b> Vel Mahalingum 19.57	<b>Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund</b> Rajadeva Alahan 102.00 Michael R. Eisen 25.00 Total 127.00	<b>Hindu Literature Fund</b> John & Abha Wiersba 153.00	<b>Panchangam Endowment Fund</b> Anonymous 29.01 Lily Goncalves 16.00 P. Gopalakrishnan 51.00 Bhagirath Gopinath 101.00 Kumar Krishnan 11.00 Ravi & Rupa Nemana 10.00 Sumita Ranganathan 11.00 Sidharth Sankar 10.00 Vardharajan Shanmugavelu 5.00 Total 244.01
<b>Hindu of the Year Fund</b> Rajendra Giri 110.00	<b>A. Saravanapavan Family Murugan Temple Pillaiyar Shrine Fund</b> Pathmini Saravanapavan 150.00	<b>Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund</b> Anonymous 100.00 Shyamadeva Dandapani 33.00 Total 133.00	<b>Digital Dharma Endowment</b> Anonymous 5,414.08 Chamundi Sabanathan 1,822.00 Total 7,236.08
<b>Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment</b> Aravindraj Chandrasekaran 9.00 Anonymous 128.24 Devajyothi Kondapi 102.00 Umasankaran Mohambourame 153.00 Govri Nadason 163.98 Parimala Selvaraj 62.00 Bala Sivaceyon 30.00 Total 648.22	<b>Thank You Bodhinatha Fund</b> Hotranatha Ajaya 33.00 A. & Sri Dhevi Arasaratnam 953.01 Amarnath & Latha Devvarmanai 216.00 Debashis Ghosh 300.00 Toshadeva Guhan 108.00 Gunasekaran Kandasamy 362.00 Jothi & Shridhar Kottia 5,000.00 Magaletchumi Letchumanan 201.00 Dayavati Murugan 108.00 Toshadevi Nataraj 100.00 Mano Navaratnarajah 150.00	<b>Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund</b> Victoria Lynne Johnson 3.00	<b>Insurance Premiums</b> Mrunal Patel 3,003.00
<b>Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund</b> Anonymous 251.00 Shyamadeva Dandapani 33.00 Kulagan Moonesawmy 19.57 Carmen Debora Murbach 1,000.00 Govri Nadason 163.98 Toshadevi Nataraj 120.00 Barathiy Sockanathan 45.62 Vayudeva Varadan 54.00 Other Donations 4,800.00 Total 6,487.17	<b>Siva Poomi School Trust</b> Anonymous 100.00	<b>Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment</b> Anonymous 672.06 Kumarasingham Balasingham 500.00 Marlene Carter 108.00 Sunil Chacko 530.00 Sasikumar Darmalingam 50.00 Rajendra Giri 110.00 Saroja Devi Manickam 3.00 Balakrishnan Mylvaganam 20.00 Natraj Narayanswami 11.00 Subramaniam Pennathur 50.01 Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan 157.00 Andrew Stich 300.00 Soma Sundaram 15.00 Total 2,526.07	<b>Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment</b> Other Donations 600.00
Total Contributions \$250,306.85			
Funds at Market Value, Jun 30, 2014			
Total Endowment Funds \$13,362,342.48			



## Jyotish Vachaspathi R.G. Krishnan

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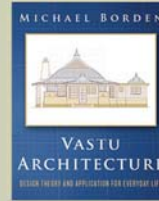
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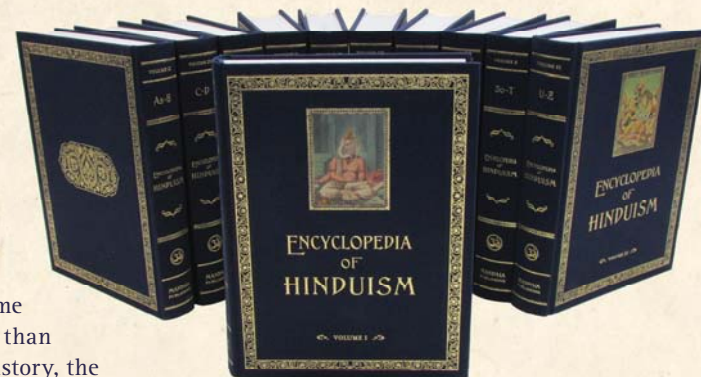
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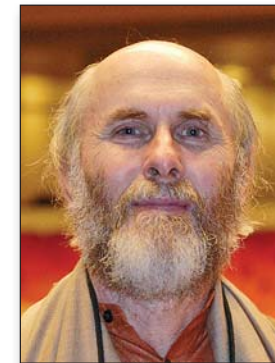


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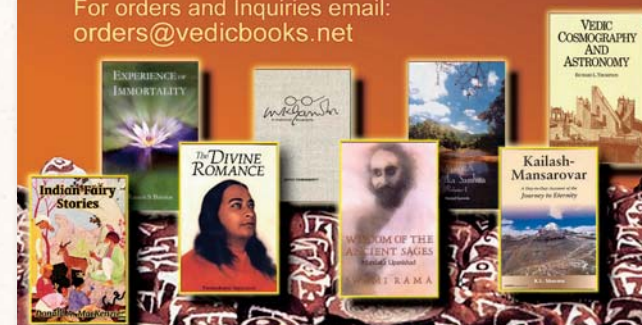


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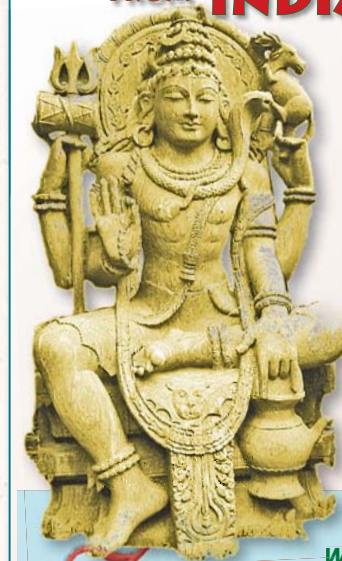
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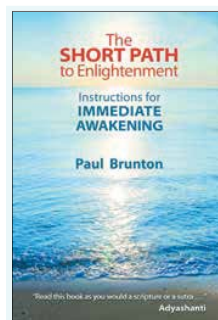
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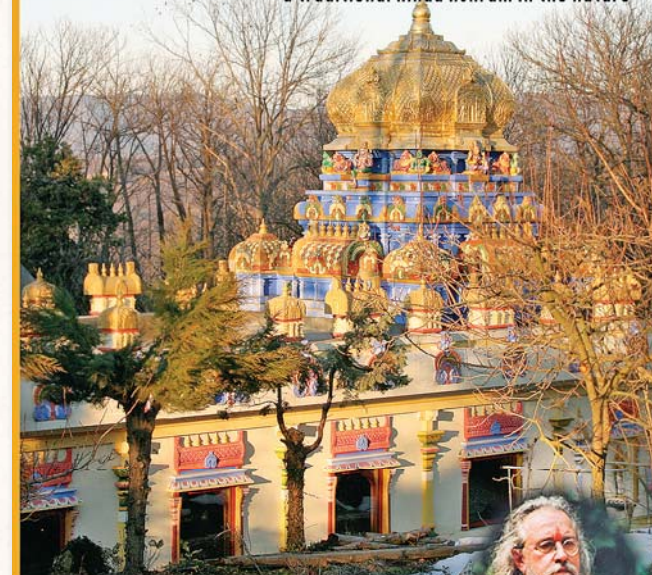


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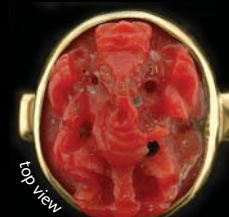
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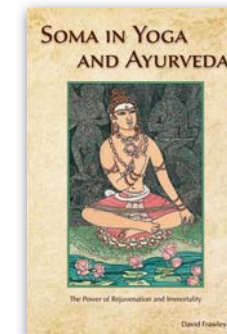
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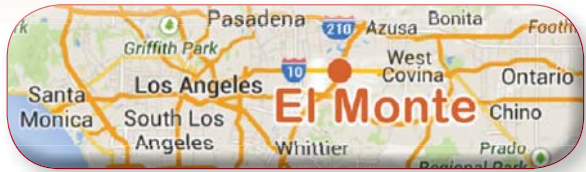
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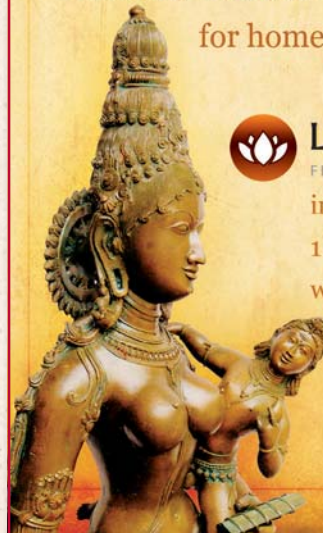


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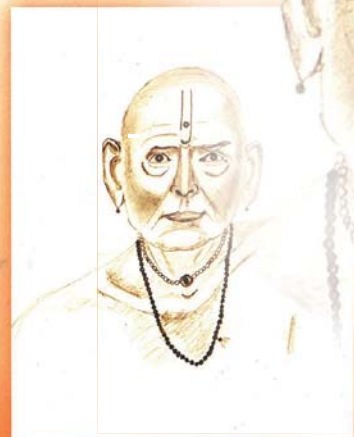
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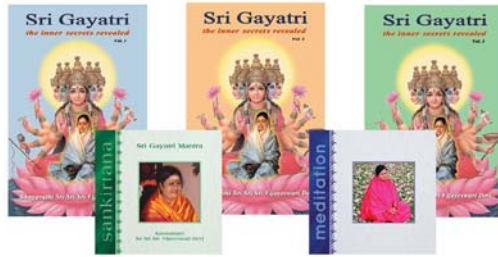




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# DIGITAL DHARMA

By Murali Balaji

EDUCATION

## “History of Hindu India” a New Video Resource for Teachers and Parents

TEACHING HISTORY CONTINUES TO BE ONE of the biggest challenges in school districts across America, as schools must often grapple with outdated standards and old, wretchedly inaccurate textbooks. In addition, teachers can sometimes struggle transitioning to the most current pedagogical approaches.

History can also be highly politicized, as we continue to see in states such as Texas, where small but vocal groups envisage instructional materials and curriculum shaped solely by their own worldviews. Teachers I've trained to teach Hinduism complain that they're often caught in the middle between angry parents and school district or even state-level mandates. Moreover, there aren't many vetted multimedia resources that can engage students across grade levels.

Teaching about Hinduism and ancient Indian history is especially problematic because Hinduism and India aren't one and the same. However, the Himalayan Academy's nuanced approach in their newly released, 23-minute “History of Hindu India” video provides a great template, explaining the overlaps by highlighting the development

of Hindu culture in what is now India over thousands of years. The video, produced and directed by Sushma Khadepaun and narrated by Roger (Raj) Narayan, supplements Himalayan Academy's textbook of the same name.

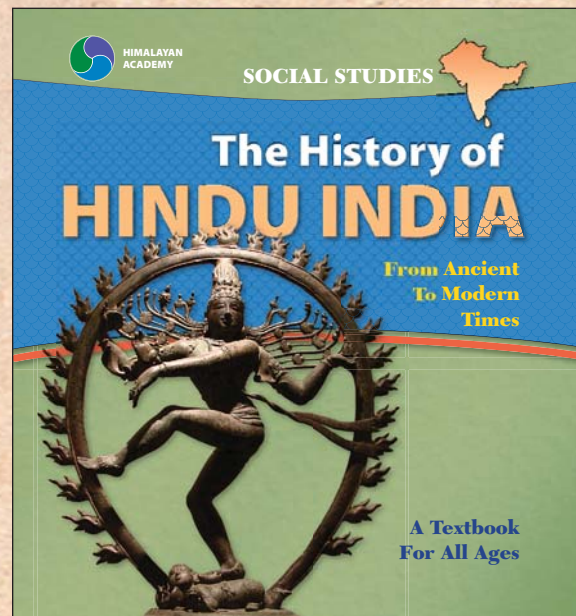
Himalayan Academy, publisher of HINDUISM TODAY, produced the video and the textbook in “response to the problem of negative portrayal of Hinduism and India in school textbooks,” and their approach relied on academic expertise and vetting. The primary author was Shiva Bajpai, professor emeritus of history at California State University-Northridge, while noted religion scholars such as Anantanand Rambachan, Jefferey Long, T.S. Rukmani and Klaus Klostermaier were consulted for accuracy.

The video provides a compelling look at underrepresented aspects of India's history, as well as the development of Hinduism from both a cultural and philosophical standpoint. Developed primarily for sixth graders, the video can be used at almost all grade levels through high school. While its tone is positive, the content isn't preachy and aligns to meet state and local standards on teaching about religion.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the video is that it can also be used by parents (Hindu and non-Hindu alike) for cultural education. It has been released with Hindi, Tamil, Spanish, French, English, and Bahasa Indonesia subtitles. The video's distribution can be an important tool to help expand understandings about Hinduism in classrooms across the country.

View or download the movie at: [www.bit.ly/history-hindu-india](http://www.bit.ly/history-hindu-india)

[www.hinduismtoday.com](http://www.hinduismtoday.com)



**Visually rich:** (clockwise from top) The film is based on Himalayan Academy's social studies book series; Actor Raj Narayan narrates the film from a temple in India; the film is supplemented with artwork by Indra Sharma, S. Rajam and more.

